Steven Vosloo
Digital learning, innovation and policy specialist

Personal details

South African | Born 1973 | Languages: English, Afrikaans
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Profile

> What others say about me: *"Steve is one of those rare people who knows what it takes to bridge not just technological divides but social ones, consistently figuring out not just how to create new tools, but how to get people to use them in meaningful ways."*
> Clay Shirky, author of *Here Comes Everybody* and *Cognitive Surplus*

- **Digital innovator, practitioner, researcher and policy developer** with 18 years of experience
- Specialist in **education technology and innovation**, **mobile learning, M4D** - always using technology for social impact
- **On-the-ground implementation experience** from a number of developing countries, as well as a **global research, strategy and policy perspective**
- Solid **programme design and management experience** – have fully **conceptualised, designed, budgeted and managed** many ICT4D projects, including resourcing, contracting and supervision of evaluation
- Practice principles of **user-centered design, agile software development and lean innovation** (certified product life cycle coach)
- **Strong people management skills** from leading local and internationally distributed teams
- Experienced in **partnership and stakeholder management** of international agencies, the media, high-level business, government and academia
- Solid **communications experience** through managing publications, global events and social media
- Excellent **writing and research skills**: authored many **reports and papers** in fields of specialisation
- Excellent **presentation skills** in large and high-level events, including **keynotes** at academic, UN and other popular conferences and panels
- Well **networked** in international mobile and education sectors, such as with UNHCR, UNICEF, Sesame Workshop, USAID, and many more
- **Mantra:** "Use the ICTs in the hands of people to enable their participation"

Higher education

- **Masters in Information Systems** *cum laude* – University of Cape Town (UCT), 2008
- **Bachelor of Commerce Honours** (Information Systems) *cum laude* – UCT, 2004
- **Postgraduate Diploma** (Information Systems) – UCT, 2003
- **National Diploma** (Information Technology) – Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, 1995

Awards, fellowships and research grants

- **Netexplo Award** for Yoza Cellphone Stories, 2013
- 21st Century Learning Fellow, **Shuttleworth Foundation**, 2007-11
- **Firelight Foundation** grant for Digital Hero Book Project, 2007-08
- **Shuttleworth Foundation** grant for research on digital storytelling by youth, 2006-2008
- Reuters Digital Vision Fellowship at **Stanford University**, 2006-2007

Employment history

Digital Policy Specialist, UNICEF, New York
September 2018 – Present

UNICEF is the lead UN agency for children and I am its digital policy specialist, based in the [Office of Global Insight and Policy](#) (OGIP). The Office serves as an internal think-tank, investigating issues with implications for children, equipping the Organization to more effectively shape the global discourse, and preparing it for the future by scanning the horizon for frontier issues and ways of working. I focus on key emerging digital issues for children, such as AI, digital literacy, and mis/disinformation, and position the Organization as a thought leader on digital issues for children.

Key project: AI for children:
- I set up and lead the [AI for Children Policy Project](#), a 2-year initiative in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Finland, that aims to see more child-centred AI systems and policies in the world, including in education, health and children's play
- Developed the work plan for the project, raised the funds for it (largest external funding for OGIP) and manage the partnership with the MFA
- Co-authored the [Policy Guidance on AI for Children](#) (a world first)
- Pioneered a user-centred design policy development approach: held global consultations with [experts](#) and children, released an official draft policy guidance and invited governments and companies to pilot it as well as held public consultations, from learnings oversaw the writing of [case studies](#) and updating of the guidance to release a non-draft version 2.0
- Oversaw the first UN [global consultation with children on AI](#) to inform the development of the guidance, based on nine workshops with 245 children in five countries
- Managed the hosting of the world's first [Global Forum on AI for Children](#), to raise awareness of children and AI and help plot a better AI future
- Achievements: The Government of Scotland has officially adopted the draft policy guidance in its [national AI strategy](#)

Key project: Digital literacy
- While many excellent digital literacy initiatives were being driven at UNICEF, the efforts were ad hoc and lacking a coherent framework. I worked with Education colleagues to map the current digital literacy policy and practice landscape; highlight existing competence frameworks and how they can be adapted to UNICEF's needs; survey the needs and efforts of UNICEF country offices (a first across the Organization); and offer policy and programme recommendations, including a new definition of digital literacy for UNICEF.
- Co-authored [Digital literacy for children: exploring definitions and frameworks](#)

Key highlights and thought leadership:
- Co-authored [Digital misinformation / disinformation and children](#), with Oxford's Internet Institute
- Member of the World Economic Forum's [Global Future Council on Artificial Intelligence for Humanity](#) (invitation only). I contributed to the White Paper: A Holistic Guide to Approaching AI Fairness Education in Organizations (to be published soon)
- Advisory group member of UNESCO's [Global Declaration on Connectivity for Education](#)
- Delivered one of the keynotes at the [Beijing AI Conference](#) on Why we need child-centred AI and how we can achieve it
- Contributed to UNICEF's [Prospects for children: A global outlook 2021-2025](#)
- Co-authored internal / public intelligence briefs for the Office of the Executive Director on cyber attacks, online hate speech, and [COVID-19 and children's digital privacy](#)
- Working group member of UNICEF's initiative for [Good Governance of Children's Data](#)

Senior Project Officer, UNESCO, Paris
November 2016 – August 2018

UNESCO is the lead UN agency for education. At headquarters, I managed the [*UNESCO-Pearson Initiative for Literacy: Improved Livelihoods in a Digital World*](#), which studied how inclusive digital solutions can help people with low skills and low literacy use technology in a way that supports skills development and, ultimately, improves livelihoods. I led the research, policy and guidelines development for the project. I was also a member of the Core Innovation Team at UNESCO and the organisation's focal point for the UN Innovation Network.

Key outputs included:
- Co-authored a landscape review of digital solutions for low-skilled and low-literate people
- Co-authored and produced 14 case studies of inclusive digital solutions in the fields of health, agriculture, government, environmental practices, and displaced populations
- Co-authored and produced UNESCO guidelines for developing inclusive digital solutions for low-skilled and low-literate youth and adults

Head of Mobile, Innovation Lab, Pearson South Africa
January 2014 – October 2016

Pearson South Africa is a critical Growth market for Pearson, one of the world's leading education companies. Traditionally an educational publisher, it is now transitioning into the online and mobile spaces through digital education services.

Responsibilities included:
- Driving research into the digital usage of learners and teachers, as well as the educational impact of digital products
- Leading the mobile learning strategy development and initiatives, based on agile development methodologies and ensuring a user- and mobile-first experience
- Product manager for key projects in South Africa, supporting global development teams
- Managing budgets, projects, teams and external software providers, all the while establishing best practices for continuous product development lifecycle improvement
- Communicating plans and project progress publicly and to internal stakeholders
- Growing the mobile focus of Pearson through partnerships, networking and presenting at international conferences

Achievements
- Certified Product Life Cycle coach, implementing agile software development and innovation principles in the company
- Developed the mobile learning strategy for Pearson South Africa
- South African Product Manager for Pearson global e-reader, delivered to 8,000 HE students, and Learning Management System, piloted in 3 Free State schools
- Product manager of X-kit Achieve Mobile, Pearson South Africa's first schools mobile service, offering high school test and exam revision for learners with feature and smart phones. The content is fully curriculum-aligned, levelled for difficulty and based on a solid theoretical framework, while the service includes leaderboards, badges and social network integration
- Innovation Lab lead for the tablet implementation at CTI and MGI, two higher education institutions in South Africa owned by Pearson (the largest tablet rollout in the country)
- Strategic advisor to Project Literacy, Pearson's 5-year global social impact campaign, launched in Sept 2014, that aims to support literacy development in a mobile age

Senior Project Officer, Mobile Learning, UNESCO, Paris
November 2011 – December 2013

My role at headquarters was to establish and lead the organisation's mobile learning strategy, programmes, publications and events. The goal was to provide insight, policy guidelines and expert guidance to Member States on how to practically leverage mobile technologies to help achieve the Education for All goals.

Responsibilities included:
- Heading up the mobile learning team, managing specialists both at HQ and in the field
- Driving research and policy development on mobile learning and mobile usage
- Managing international mobile learning projects in the areas of policy, teacher development and mobiles for reading
- Developing new proposals, creating and managing budgets, contracting and managing consultants and partners, and overseeing monitoring and evaluation of projects
- Organizing mobile learning conferences, workshops and seminars
- Managing the programmes' communications strategy, including the publications plan
- Managing the partnership between UNESCO and Nokia from both a substantive and administrative perspective

- Representing UNESCO on the mEducation Alliance Executive Steering Committee

Achievements:
- Co-managed four Mobiles for Teacher Development projects in Nigeria, Senegal, Pakistan and Mexico
- Managed the Mobiles for Reading project, surveying users in seven developing countries on how mobiles are, and can be, used to support literacy development
- Publication of *UNESCO Working Paper Series on Mobile Learning*
  - Managed publication process, including high-level editing, of 14 papers that have been translated into multiple languages
  - Authored one of the 14 papers: *Mobile Learning and Policies: Key Issues to Consider*
  - World Bank blog review: "this series of papers is highly recommended reading"
- Publication of *UNESCO Policy Guidelines for Mobile Learning*
  - Led the development of, and co-authored, the guidelines
  - Managed a broad consultation process from experts, public and 20 Member States
- Contributed to the *Technology, Broadband and Education: Advancing the Education for All Agenda* report, coordinated by UNESCO for the UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development
- Successful hosting of Mobile Learning Week 2011 and 2013, including the Senior Education Policy Makers' Forum, attended by participants from 45 countries
- Member of the Advisory Board for the *Horizon Report > 2013 K-12 Edition*

Mobile Impact Evangelist and Manager of Cape Town office, mLab Southern Africa, Cape Town
March – October 2011

The mLab (mobile applications laboratory) Southern Africa (SA), supports innovation and entrepreneurship by incubating mobile apps and content in the Southern Africa region. The mLab SA is based in Pretoria with a satellite office in Cape Town. This initiative and mLab East Africa in Nairobi, were the first of a number of mLabs to be launched around the world, and are supported by *info*Dev (World Bank), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Finland, and Nokia.

Responsibilities included:
- Identifying, selecting and mentoring start-ups, as well as monitoring/evaluating their progress
- Setting the strategic direction for the growth of the mLab stakeholder community
- "Evangelising" the opportunity that appropriate and user-centred mobile apps offer for supporting education, health, finance, etc. in new ways, based on my M4D knowledge and experience
- Promoting the mLab and mobile development in Southern Africa by engaging local developers, entrepreneurs and institutions through events and outreach programmes, and by presenting at local and international conferences
- Developing deep and mutually supportive relationships with academic, training and research bodies, similar regional and international institutions, and industry stakeholders
- Developing resources on mobile app business models, sustainability, research, etc.
- Establishing and managing the Cape Town office
- Establish and maintaining the online presence of the mLab (e.g. website, knowledge base, blog, newsletters, Twitter, Facebook, etc.)

Fellow, 21st Century Learning, Shuttleworth Foundation, Cape Town
November 2007 – February 2011

Holding the prestigious Shuttleworth Foundation fellowship, my mandate was to conceptualise and lead innovative educational initiatives that use ICT and mobile technology to improve teaching and learning in the 21st century in South Africa.

Achievements:
- Founded *m4Lit* (mobiles for literacy), also known as *Yoza Cellphone Stories*, to support teen reading and writing using mobile phones. In first 18 months in South Africa and Kenya: 120,000 full story reads, 30,000 comments and 10,000 competition entries
- Fully conceptualised, designed and budgeted the project. Contracted and managed suppliers. Helped design the project evaluation and supervised the execution of that by the University of Cape Town

- m4Lit clearly demonstrated that mobile phones are a viable distribution channel for long form content and enabling user participation, not only in Japan where m-novels are popular but in Africa, which is "book poor" but "mobile phone rich"
- m4Lit won numerous local and international awards for innovation and received media coverage by the BBC and NPR – for more see m4lit.wordpress.com
- Wrote papers on digital games and learning, the effects of mobile texting on literacy and mother-tongue education
- Hosted networking workshops for digital games and learning in Johannesburg and Cape Town
- Led the teachable agents project: piloted Stanford University software at 5 schools in Cape Town to research teachable agents as effective teaching tools
- Judge of the Digital Media and Learning competition funded by the MacArthur Foundation
- Advisor to the Department of Basic Education on its Guidelines on e-Safety in Schools

Fellow, Reuters Digital Vision Programme, Stanford University, Palo Alto
September 2006 – October 2007

One-year fellowship programme in social entrepreneurship to incubate innovative projects that best utilise ICT for social change. Only 3% of global applicants are accepted onto the programme. Through seminars, mentoring and full immersion at Stanford University the programme taught participants how to apply Silicon Valley innovation, technology and entrepreneurship to ICT4D projects in developing countries.

My research project was the *Digital Hero Book*, which built upon a proven paper-based intervention to provide psychosocial support to young people. I used mobile phones, social networking and digital storytelling to create a digital approach to the hero book process, and in this way was able to, for the first time, connect low-income "hero bookers" from around the world The participating youth and teachers were taught ICT skills and increased their cross-cultural awareness, demonstrating the power of digital to support youth voices for positive social change. The Reuters Foundation and the Shuttleworth Foundation funded the project, which included the development of a toolkit.

Design and Usability Team Leader, Centre for e-Innovation, Provincial Government of the Western Cape, Cape Town
September 2003 – September 2006

Mandate: To help establish Cape Gateway (capegateway.gov.za) as the single point of access for all government information and make it as relevant and usable as possible to the citizens of the Western Cape.

Achievements:
- Portal grew to 60,000 pages of information
- Awards for Cape Gateway: World Summit Awards – Special mention in the e-government category (2005) and Centre for Public Service Innovation: runner-up in the category "Innovative Enhancements on Internal Systems within Government" (2005)

Responsibilities included:
- Understanding citizen needs – information and usability needs – and creating a relevant and usable site
- Conducting usability reviews and briefing the software and content teams
- Writing full user and functional requirements specifications for the site
- Training and change management
- Researching, planning and strategising future versions of Cape Gateway
- Also played an advisory role within the Centre for e-Innovation:
  - Informed the work of the Presidential National Commission on Information Society and Development by, e.g. participating in workshops, reviewing draft e-strategy documents and writing papers on its work
  - Attended and presented at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005)
  - Advised on Cape Access, the provincial rural ICT-access project

Earlier work experience

From 1996 to 2003 worked in Johannesburg, London and Cape Town in various roles including web developer, project manager, team leader, usability and accessibility consultant, information architect, content author, strategist and researcher

- SA clients included: South African Airways, Volkswagen, Old Mutual and Western Cape Tourism Board
- UK clients included: The Guardian, Macmillan Publishing, British Telecom (BT), Royal Mail, Lloyds TSB, British Red Cross and Shell

Selected invited presentations and writing

A full list of presentations and writings are available online at stevevosloo.com.

Board memberships

I am a board member of the FunDza Literacy Trust, a South African non-profit organisation dedicated to improving literacy among teens and young adults.