

# Video Interview with Prakash Nair Monday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2006

*What Prakash says about...*

## **Q1. The design of new schools - what will they look like in 30 years?**

*Asked at 01:04*

*Answer Starts at 01:04:04*

*Answer Ends at 01:04:42:10*

I think given the fact that we are moving firmly into the conceptual age where we are going to be much more a society where our success is going to depend on our ability to think on our feet – be very agile if you will. Be creative thinkers, be critical thinkers, be social learner, I think spaces have to reflect that kind of conceptual age thinking. We have to really migrate away from the so called factory model where you taught the same thing to the same people at the same time to a much more differentiated model of instruction and the spaces simply have to have the rich variety to suit that sort of education system.

## **Q2. What will be the role of educators (principals and teachers in designing schools)?**

*Asked at 01:04:42:10*

*Answer starts at 01:04:49*

*Answer ends at 01:05:29:20*

I think the role of educators is going to be very different because educators, traditionally, were the fountains of knowledge for example but now with now knowledge and information being available at your fingertips, I think the focus really has to be on educators imparting their wisdom. So really what we are talking about is increasing the role of the educator, more as the caring mentor, an adult who would guide the student as apposed to transmitting knowledge. So that's a significant change in the role of the teacher and school facility design for a teacher as a facilitator will look very different from school facility design for a teacher as the sage on the stage.

## **Q3. What facilities do you envisage would support the learning process in schools in the future?**

*Asked at 01:05:33*

*Answer starts at 01:05:33:10*

*Answer ends at 01:06:23*

Well, I think that the first thing that I would say about facilities that support the new learning process is to go away from the notion of school as a place, but to make school an experience. Just as learning is not a place but learning is an experience. I think that what we need to do is make the whole community a school, I mean there are huge opportunities to learn outside the boundaries of what we use to traditionally call a school and I think that what we need to do is to have a much broader definition of school. And even when you do build a school, it should be more a community learning centre because learning doesn't begin or end with K to 12 education, adults are just as much part of that process. So I think the future school is going to be much more than four walls bound by a fence, its going to be the community, the entire community.

#### **Q4. What is the role of the community in schools in the future?**

*Asked at 01:06:23*

*Answer starts at 01:06:28*

*Answer ends at 01:07:08*

I think that really the whole notion of it takes the village, that is actually pretty true, to educate a child. We need to make sure that every resource that's available in the community becomes integrated into the education system. Not only does that make it more inexpensive, if you will, to build schools of the future. It also means that school itself becomes a much more interesting activity. Instead of being stuck inside a school, kids are actually out there in the community taking full advantage of the learning resources that are already available there.

#### **Q5. How can a community maximise the benefits of a new school design within cost constraints?**

*Asked at 01:07:08*

*Answered at 01:07:16*

*Answer ends at 01:08:13*

I know there's a lot of thinking that perhaps to do the schools of the future you have to spend a lot of money, that's just not the case. The fact is that there are many buildings that are out there that probably would work very well as schools of the future but are simply being passed over because they don't look like schools and I think that probably buildings that don't look like schools are the places that the best kind of education can happen because you are not stuck with the student types of the past and you are not trying to duplicate what you knew. So I think that there might be many buildings, offices, industrial buildings out there, right in the heart of

the communities, that students can utilise that could be very, very good schools. Now this has happened, as you know, in New York City with the Millennium High School, it's happened in Duluth, Minnesota with Harbour City International, it's happened in California with High Tech High. These are all schools and buildings that were never originally configured as school buildings.

**Q6. What sort of research based work impacts on school design?**

*Asked at 01:08:25*

*Answer starts at 01:08:34*

*Answer ends at 01:09:26:14*

It's interesting when you talk about the research, actually it's very simple. What we're saying is if that if you are convinced about the research on the world of education about the E.L.'s and about the personalised learning for example, about self directed learning. If you're convinced about that, then the facility simply needs to support that. What we talk about is that the research that is already evident in the world of education simply needs to be reflected and manifested in the physical form and that's what a school building is or a school campus is. And so there really doesn't need to be much more than that to support the notion that just as education needs to be variegated, so also do school design spaces.

**Q7. Tell us about how student safety impacts on school design.**

*Asked at 01:09:26*

*Answer starts at 01:09:31*

*Answer ends at 01:10:19*

There is this notion that somehow you are having safe schools when you police them and I think we need to go away from the idea of policing a school to the idea of creating a caring community where everybody knows everybody else. Also, this idea that if community members come into the school that it's a less safe place, there is no evidence that is true at all. In fact, we probably create much safer schools when the community actively engage and take ownership of the building. In fact, even in the toughest neighbourhoods, schools that have been adopted, if you will, by the community are far safer places, have far less evidence of vandalism and damage than schools that are treated very traditionally where the students are treated like prisoners and the teachers like wardens and then you have, literally, policemen patrolling the corridors. So, I think that safety really is more about building community.

**Q8. Prakash talks about the concept of a “shell” and a “standardised design” for schools that can be flexible enough to meet the needs of community members in the future. It is better to *under design* than *over design* a school.**

*Asked at 01:10:20*

*Answer starts at 01:10:36*

*Answer ends at 01:11:14*

I think sometimes we get lost in the notion of creating a perfect school, and what we don't realise is that, unlike a home for example where a family might inhabit that home for many, many, many years, a school community is a transient community, they come and go, from leadership to students. So I think it's a mistake to over design a school and architects have to remember that the best kind of school is one that is under designed, which gives a huge amount of opportunity for the occupants to tailor and customise it on a day-to-day basis. I'd love to go to a school that looks different day to day, month-to-month, year-to-year where the individuals who occupy that school have an opportunity to personalise and customise it their own taste.

**Q9. How can school communities redesign existing buildings to get the maximum benefits for future education incorporating and creating areas to cater for the *modalities of learning*?**

*Asked at 01:11:24*

*Answer starts at 01:11:31*

*Answer ends at 01:12:23*

I think that we need to be aware that most of the schools in the world are already built and we can't ignore our existing stock. I think that what we need to do though is go back to those 18 modalities of learning, if you will: personalised learning, individual learning, collaborative learning, learning with technology, P.O. tutoring and all of these modes of learning and take a look at the building as you have it and find out how to accommodate those modes of learning. You might be able to do that by taking down a wall, by opening up a corridor, by replacing furniture, there is a lot of things you can do within the shell, if you will, of an existing building that people don't believe, they think that you may have to go out and build a brand new building when in fact you can create those modalities of learning by using existing buildings, making connections with the outdoors and all these other great design solutions that might allow you to preserve old buildings.

**Q10. Tell us about the “sustainable future enquiry centre” you have designed.**

*Asked at 01:12:33*

*Answer starts at 01:12:36*

*Answer ends at 01:13:39*

I'm working right now with a community in the Northern suburbs in Tasmania and one of the ideas is to develop a sustainable futures enquiry centre. It's basically a place where students in that whole community would have a place that they could call their own, and it would be a special place to really model teaching and learning behaviours of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and since the school belongs to everybody, the archaic arguments go away and you don't have to make it look like a traditional school. It's going to have everything from a fishpond, to a windmill, to rainwater harvesting. The building materials will be locally bought, the forestry industry will be highlighted there, there will be decks that connect to the outdoors, there will be a farm. It's just going to be a wonderful place for students, and I think this is the kind of building I feel that students will actually be excited about to go to school and we need to make school a place where engaged learning can take place. And the Sustainable Futures Enquiry Centre in Launceston, Tasmania, I think will be such a place.

**Q11. Tell us how the “instrument” you have devised to assist with school design works.**

*Asked at 01:13:48*

*Answered at 01:13:52*

*Answer ends at 01:14:55*

We have developed an instrument called the educational facilities effectiveness instrument and really, what it is, is measuring the things that tend not to get measured when you plan and design schools. For example, we measure how welcoming is your entry to the school, we measure how well are you making connections with the outdoors, we measure how well you are dealing with the aesthetics of the building, which tend not to be measurable. And, we are talking about how well you connect to the community, we talk about sustainable futures and how well they are being integrated in the curriculum, for example. There are all these kinds of good, solid design practices, such as transparency - how well students feel connected to the outdoors, how well they feel connected to other parts of the school, things that really make a difference to the day-to-day life of teachers and students that we have incorporated in this tool. And what we do is go in to schools, whether they be new schools or existing schools, and we measure

how well are they doing these really subtle, but important things, that would make a difference between success and failure of the education process.

### **Q12. What are the features of a new school design?**

*Asked at 01:16:28*

*Answered at 01:16:28:21*

*Answer ends at 01:17:57:03*

I think that new schools should incorporate something other than the classroom, perhaps a learning studio which allows many modalities of learning to take place. I think that schools of the future should seriously think about the social dimension of learning, and that should happen throughout the school. We should get away from the very institutional setting, for example of the cafeteria, perhaps break that down to into smaller groupings and call them cafés where you can also have informal collaborative learning taking place. We need to definitely connect schools much more strongly with the outdoors. I think it's a crime for students to spend so much time indoors when they could be doing so much of their learning outdoors. I think that we need to create much more transparency in the building so that teachers are not isolated in their classrooms but can actually see what's happening outside... send students, whether it's to an outdoors deck or to a little area outside their classroom, I think teachers should be able to work collaboratively with each other. I think that schools should connect much more strongly with the community, that idea is going to be a big part of the future. I also think schools should model sustainable design, in a very responsible way, and then make that sustainable design clearly a part of the curriculum so students are seeing their building as a 3 dimensional text book. There are lots of things that you can do in a new building that truly models the behaviours we talk about very comfortably in the education realm but they don't get transferred in the building facilities realm.

### **Q13. Who are the stakeholders in creating a sustainable school design for future education?**

*Asked at 01:19:20*

*Answered at 01:19:21*

*Ends at 01:20:56:09*

Clearly there are many, many stakeholders of education and each of these stakeholders have a role to play in the success of an education system. If you look at it from the perspective of the state, I think the state has a very legitimate role to play in setting a very, very broad vision for where education is headed and how they

would like to see all children succeed but that vision needs to be translated at a local level. So you're talking about local government, for example, saying how can we play a part in education, how can we share our facilities, our know how with schools. And then you have the school leadership, which take the states vision but then customises that vision for the special needs of the local community. You also have the important role of educating the local parents and community members about how education has changed so when they come in to school they shouldn't expect to see the same things happening in school as might have been happening 20 or 30 years ago. Parents have a legitimate role to play in being very active members of the school, in being involved in the day-to-day running of the school. Teachers obviously need to feel very appreciated because they still are probably the most important element in the success of a child in school. Then, students have to feel like they have a stake in this, that they fell like this is not about adults telling them what to do, but that their voices are going to be heard and they do have a clear right, if you will, to say what their education should be about and so each child should be able to realise his or her full potential. So, I think all stakeholders of education, working together, can truly create schools of the future.

**Q14. What is the most rewarding part of your work?**

*Asked at 01:22*

*Answer starts at 01:22:15*

*Answer ends at 01:23:02*

I think the most rewarding part of my work is that I get to work with communities all around the world and that's a tremendous sense of satisfaction. To be able to make a difference in the lives of children by working closely with parents, educators, teachers, state government officials and to have a small part in the change process, if you will. I feel that my greatest accomplishment, if anything, is to try to be a change agent but really just take advantage of the resources that local communities already have. In a sense all I think that I'm doing is being a catalyst. But it's a great sense of satisfaction to be part of that change process and to help bring about that change through making people think a little more deeply about the future of education.