

European STEAME – Academies Conference 2026

Keynote Presentation 1

Making Space for Learning

Designing for Connection, Curiosity, and Purpose



Prakash Nair, AIA

Founding President & CEO
Education Design International

ABSTRACT

Most school buildings today are still modeled on an industrial system designed to deliver uniformity, even though the world our children are growing into demands something entirely different. If education is to prepare young people for lives of meaning, health, and contribution, then the spaces where they learn must reflect those values. What if teachers and students were not confined to buildings designed as factories of instruction but immersed in ecosystems that nurture connection, spark curiosity, and give every child a sense of purpose?

In this keynote, Prakash Nair draws on global examples and insights from neuroscience, biophilic and health-promoting design, to show how schools can be reimaged as vibrant communities aligned with human development and well-being.

Yet design is only part of the story. Its full potential emerges when educators are spatially aware, able to notice how light, acoustics, layout, and material choices influence focus, energy, and connection. When educators activate this potential, schools transform from rigid systems into living environments that inspire curiosity, foster relationships, and help every learner grow into the best version of themselves.

BIO

Prakash Nair is a futurist, a visionary architect, and the Founding President & CEO of Education Design International (EDI), a company with consultations in 59 countries on six continents. He is the recipient of many international awards,

including the A4LE MacConnell Award, the highest honor worldwide for school design.

He has written extensively in leading international journals about school design. He is the author of five books, including the new landmark publication *Blueprint for Tomorrow: Redesigning Schools for Student-Centered Learning*, published by the Harvard Education Press.

Prakash served as an instructor for [Harvard X "Leaders of Learning"](#) about the shifting landscape of learning. *Leaders of Learning* has had over 400,000 registrants worldwide.

He is widely considered to be the world's leading architect of Innovative Schools. He lectures frequently at major universities and authors a blog on school design. He is a regular keynote speaker at international events and has delivered a TEDx talk. Prakash's signature talent lies in his ability to communicate his passion for a new approach to education across the globe.

Invited Sessions

The Silent Curriculum: How School Spaces Shape Learning and Well-Being



Dr. Parul Minhas, Director of Research and Digital Innovation at Education Design International

ABSTRACT

Schools are more than lessons and textbooks. They also carry a silent curriculum, written into their learning spaces, that influences how students feel, connect, and grow. In this session, Dr. Parul Minhas explores how design choices such as natural light, opportunities for movement, and spaces for collaboration send powerful signals about curiosity, health, and belonging. Drawing on global examples and research in architecture, education, and well-being, she demonstrates how schools can become environments that foster both academic achievement and personal purpose. Educators and students will leave with a new understanding of how space influences daily experiences and lifelong learning.

BIO

Dr. Parul Minhas holds a PhD in Health-Promoting School Design and serves as Director of Research and Digital Innovation at Education Design International. An accomplished author of three books and numerous publications, she researches and advocates for learning environments that foster student health and well-being. With a background that bridges architecture and education, and guided by her perspective as a conscious parent, she brings a multidisciplinary lens to the future of schooling, showing how thoughtfully designed spaces can help children thrive.