

# ILRA

A PUBLICATION OF INFORMAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES, INC

INFORMAL  
LEARNING  
REVIEW

No. 153  
NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER  
2018



## **INSIDE: REDEFINING THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

PLUS: TO PEE OR NOT TO PEE, A SUMMIT WITH THE DALAI LAMA,  
SCIENCE AT THE MALL, AND MORE!

# IN THIS ISSUE:

SUMMIT WITH THE DAILAI LAMA: FOSTERING UNIVERSAL ETHICS AND COMPASSION THROUGH MUSEUMS	3
BATHROOM BOUNDARIES, TO PEE OR NOT TO PEE: AN EMPATHY EXERCISE FOR ALL	9
REDEFINING THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY	14
DISRUPTION BY DESIGN: THE DEVELOPMENT STORY OF THE PETROSAINS DESIGN THINKING PROCESS	17
SCIENCE AT THE MALL: A WIN-WIN STRATEGY FOR MUSEUMS AND MALLS	21
A MUSEUM PROPOSAL FOR THE 21ST CENTURY SOCIETY: THE LIQUID MUSEUM	23

---

Publisher information: **THE INFORMAL LEARNING REVIEW** is a copyrighted publication of Informal Learning Experiences, Inc. It appears bi-monthly in February, April, June, August, October, and December. **THE INFORMAL LEARNING REVIEW** is edited and published by Informal Learning Experiences, Inc., tel: 720.612.7476, fax: 720.528.7969, email: [ileinc@informallearning.com](mailto:ileinc@informallearning.com), mailing address: 1776 Krameria Street, Denver, CO 80220. **THE INFORMAL LEARNING REVIEW** is designed and produced in house. ISSN 1089-9367.

## S U B S C R I P T I O N   I N F O R M A T I O N

### **THE INFORMAL LEARNING REVIEW**

1 year, six issues, bimonthly, print and online:  
\$65 in the U.S., \$72 in Canada/ Mexico,  
\$80 elsewhere. Online version ONLY, \$55.  
Individual electronic issues can be purchased  
for \$12 and will be delivered via email. Please  
contact us at [ileinc@informallearning.com](mailto:ileinc@informallearning.com) if  
you would like to purchase a single issue.

### **TRAVELING EXHIBITIONS DATABASE**

1 year, unlimited access: \$85 worldwide.  
There is no charge for listing exhibitions in  
the database. Please contact us at [ileinc@informallearning.com](mailto:ileinc@informallearning.com) for more information.  
Exhibitions with immediate availability may  
be placed on the 11th Hour Page.

You can sign up for the Informal Learning Review and the Traveling Exhibitions  
Database via our website at [www.informallearning.com](http://www.informallearning.com).  
Online transactions are made securely via PayPal or Intuit.

# SUMMIT WITH THE DALAI LAMA – FOSTERING UNIVERSAL ETHICS AND COMPASSION THROUGH MUSEUMS

*By Seth Frankel*

How can His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama influence the work of museums? A group of more than two dozen professionals met recently at a summit in Dharamsala, India, to consider this question, and are working to answer it. The Summit was co-chaired by Elif Gokcigdem, author and founder of Empathy-Building Through Museums Initiative, Dr. Jon Kolkin of Kolkin Fine Art Photography, and the Office of Tibet in Washington, D.C.. The Tibet Museum was the local counterpart and the host of the Summit. It did not receive any outside funding or sponsorships. Local expenses were supported by a small registration fee collected from each participant (who privately covered individual travel and accommodations).

The group represents different aspects of museum work: from directors and leaders to educators, designers, planners, and strategists. Professionals from outside the museum world also joined, and provided differing perspectives on the role of museums and those who engage the public in informal education. Their areas of expertise included behavioral science, ethics, and social transformation. (See attendee list accompanying this article.)

Representative Ngodup Tsering, from the Office of Tibet in Washington, D.C., explains the purpose of the meeting: “This Summit initiative is inspired by His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s call for a universal secular ethics and is in keeping with his vision and advice that the delegates have gathered to deliberate on how to foster universal ethics and basic human compassion through works of museum[s]” (Saldon, 2018).

The premise was simple. A committed team would come together and meet the Dalai Lama. We’d ask a series of questions, hear from His Holiness, and then spend three days in discussions. No methodology, process, or expected outcome was determined in advance. However, a shared desire among the planners and participants was to use this experience as a starting point in the creation of a community dedicated to the goals of the summit—and to use this new community as a platform for future collaboration, innovation, and initiatives. Few of the participants had worked together previously, although many knew of each other. However, the one-degree-of-separation rule seemed to apply, and revealed connections between nearly all in attendance. The majority of the attendees were North Americans, with a few Germans added in; also present

were staff members of the Tibet Museum, who graciously organized and coordinated the conference’s logistics, and representatives from the Office of Tibet. They were stunning hosts.

Our primary connective thread was Elif Gokcigdem, editor of the book *Fostering Empathy Through Museums* (2016) and the upcoming book *Designing for Empathy* (2019). Her work on museums as a platform for human understanding has connected her to a vast range of professionals whose work parallels her own. Gokcigdem has worked with Jon Kolkin, M.D., who has collaborated with the Dalai Lama on past efforts, as well as The Honorable Ngodup Tsering, Director of the Office of Tibet in Washington, D.C.

An audience with the Dalai Lama was requested, and granted. This took place at his home location, the Central Tibetan Administration (the government in exile) in Dharamsala, India, which has served as his headquarters since he fled from the Chinese in 1959.

As many know, the Dalai Lama has traveled the world extensively to bring his secular and Buddhist teachings to audiences large and small. Perhaps no living world leader has connected with so many people in so many countries. His work today focuses on bringing together groups that have broad reach, in order to further disseminate his message. Considered in that light, the Dalai Lama’s decision to collaborate with museums makes great sense. Formal classroom education is delivered by many, many teachers, which makes broadly influencing their teaching a challenge. Every teacher, school, and district engages students in a different way. While museums do not have nearly as prolonged contact with students, we have a broader audience, a greater range of subjects, and can serve as educators throughout our audience’s lives. Further, museums support and complement the work of formal educators. Finally, museums are decentralized and need not adhere to standardized curricula that curtail experimentation. For these reasons, engaging museum leaders and practitioners was a highly effective investment of the Dalai Lama’s resources.

Meetings were set for late October 2018, and took the form of a series of facilitated and informal discussions, all led by participants. It is rare that so many professionals in any field have the luxury to pull themselves away from



their commitments, travel halfway around the globe, and spend three days thinking and engaging with others to articulate goals and plan strategies. The shared once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to speak with the Dalai Lama served as a central collective experience of the group. This memorable experience became a consistent reference point and informed later discussions and planning.

### MEETING THE DALAI LAMA

A meeting in the monastery of the Dalai Lama is rich with process and formalities. Yet for all the security, meeting room decorum, protocol and staging, the Dalai Lama himself is relaxed, accessible and downright witty. He receives hundreds of audiences each year, from individuals to high-ranking elected leaders; the formal meeting structure provides a platform that plays to the strengths of the Dalai Lama's style.

After great anticipation, our group was immediately put at ease. We met with His Holiness for about an hour and fifteen minutes. He spoke on wide ranging topics for the first 20 minutes, focusing on the importance of secular education, both formal and informal, to the development of ethics and compassion. Before 200 or so years ago, he said, all education was delivered within institutions of faith; morality, ethics and compassion were embedded in education. Now secular education is the predominant mode of teaching. And while secular education is excellent at teaching facts and ideas, it has not focused on teaching ethics and compassion.

Attendee Jim Wharton, director of conservation engagement and learning at the Seattle Aquarium notes, "The [Dalai Lama] also lamented that 'modern education' had become too focused on the intellect, with the moral and ethical development of children left to families or religion" (Wharton, 2018). The implication being that for the western world, despite the positive effects of separation of church and state, in other words, there has been an obvious gap in "compassion education." The Dalai Lama's words forcefully implied that the secular world has not recognized the hole that's left once religion is removed from education. This is a role that museums can—and should—fill.

Even in the sciences of physics and psychology, the Dalai Lama argues, many ancient practices are more advanced and insightful than modern science, such as in the areas of behavioral sciences and certain aspects of quantum physics. Modern science, on the other hand, has excellent insights into brain function, earth science, physiology, and other disciplines. This comment served as his opening for the role of museums in teaching compassion and universal ethics: referring to the "mapping of the mind and

emotion," he stated that education can play a significant role in the practice of healthy mind and happiness. To the critical-minded Westerner, this may sound like a big hug-fest; however, it is clear that the task elaborated by the Dalai Lama does not involve simple feel-good handholding. Rather, through formal processes and methodologies, some understood and some yet to mature, we can design and develop informal learning systems based on social and biological sciences that build compassion into the content we deliver to our audiences.



*Figure 1 (ABOVE) - His Holiness The 14th Dalai Lama leading our group in both serious and light-hearted discussions of topics including secular ethics, museums, and education. The meeting took place in Dharamsala, India on October 29, 2018. Photo by Ven Jamphei Tenzin/OHHDL.*

*Figure 2 (BELOW) - With the Dalai Lama after discussion the role of museums in universal ethics and compassion. Photo by Ven Jamphei Tenzin/OHHDL.*



During the question and discussion period, the Executive Director of the Portland Children’s Museum, Ruth Shelly, described a question asked by young visitors (ages 6-8) who were working on empathy and perspective-taking during their class visit to the museum. The group’s guide described a sequential process for creating compassion: *notice, feel, pause, think, act*. The children asked if the last step, action, can be a *skipped* action and still be compassionate.

In response, the Dalai Lama noted that action, by its very definition, has a physiological component, and that this part of compassion is critical. Compassion cannot exist without action. This literal “call to action” led to an interesting conversation afterwards, as participants discussed tensions museums face when working in the service of participatory change. Rather than define their role simply as presenters and interpreters of collections and expert knowledge, should museums begin to include behavioral change as a core measure of their success? If so, how should that be measured? And how long will it take to achieve this transformation?

#### REACTIONS TO THE DAILAI LAMA MEETING

Following the meeting, our group (not surprisingly) worked hard to process the experience and our reactions to both the Dalai Lama as a person and his message. A sampling of representative reactions:

*“He showed us his vulnerability. That he doesn’t know and that fostering compassion is both a collaborative and individual endeavor.”*

*“There’s clearly a place [accordingly to the Dalai Lama] for formalized teaching about ethics in the public realm. How to behave? How to be compassionate? What role can museums play in this?”*

*“Training ourselves as good citizens. Using groups like this to model it.”*

*“[The Dalai Lama] balances aspiration with pragmatism. That’s something we can all learn from.”*

*“He reminded me of the expression, ‘An intelligent person wants to change the world. A wise person wants to change himself.’ [The Dalai Lama] carries both of these.”*

#### WORKSHOPS, DISCUSSIONS, AND OUTCOMES

Over the remaining two and half days, a series of workshops, cultural tours, brief “rapid fire” presentations, and some unstructured time allowed for both focused and open-ended exploration. Most of the longer workshops focused on group social interaction design (either in muse-

ums or in broader social experimentation) and on activities that challenged the participants to think in new ways about collaboration.

Tom Rockwell of the Exploratorium talked about his institution’s work through its Social Inquiry Exhibits, which involve participatory activities that promote understanding and collaboration. Philip Himberg of the Sundance Institute ran a session in which two individuals who didn’t know each other collaboratively constructed a short play based on assigned words and then acted out the play for others who were working on the same task. This led to a discussion about the best ways to break down barriers and build trust. Orna Cohen and Andreas Heinecke of Dialogue Social Enterprise (Dialogue in the Dark) led an activity in which small groups competed in silence to rapid-recognize hand signals; winners move on to a new group, in which the signals change. The change creates a complex experience of being in an in-group and then an out-group.

After these activities, discussion covered a range of approaches to unpacking social dynamics and meaning. Kürşat Özenç, from SAP Labs and Stanford, led a workshop in which teams designed new “rituals” by following a formalized, nearly scientific process for solving social problems within workplace or group culture.

The many approaches shared by participants provided us all with new tools, and hinted at ways in which museum work can augment visitors’ (and even internal staff’s) compassion through collaboration, attitude-change, and mildly discomfoting experiences.



Figure 3 – Workshops and discussions at the Seat of Happiness Temple, Norbulingka Institute ranged from programmed activities to open dialogue. Official photo, Tibet Museum and Central Tibetan Authority.



## REFLECTING ON THE EXPERIENCE

Since returning to daily work, projects and exhibit deadlines, I've been asked dozens of times what it was like to meet the Dalai Lama and what I learned. These questions have proved difficult to answer in succinct, "cocktail party"-length responses. I consider that a good thing. It's hard to corral the wise words of the Dalai Lama into a simple, actionable to-do list. At one point, the notion of a written "manifesto"-type document was discussed and rejected by the group, for the same reasons why our individual experiences will require continued revisiting and reflection before the messages evolve into concrete plans.

Even so, a few specific ideas did develop toward the end of the conference—which is not surprising, considering the kind of outcomes-oriented professionals in attendance.

While all of the participants shared a sense of synergy, each of us also had his or her own thoughts on the summit, some of which are now being shared in various media outlets. Following are two that have been shared:

*Zorana Ivcevic Pringle, Ph.D. (co-organizer of the Summit and museum scholar)*

*Elif Gokcigdem, Ph.D (research scientist at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence)*

"The first lesson is that a wise leader bases thinking on the principle of 'oneness.' This principle acknowledges the interrelation of people and their environment, but includes the oneness of the mind, which does not divide the heart and the intellect. If we act from the perspective of oneness, 'us versus them' divisions are not salient. Hurting one hurts all and helping one helps all, whether that is a next-door neighbor or an asylum-seeker fleeing another country...Another guiding principle is one of 'openness to being wrong'...As we get entrenched in deeply held opinions, it becomes difficult to admit we were wrong, even in the face of evidence. However, openness to admitting one was wrong can open doors of communication and cooperation...The Dalai Lama stressed the importance of investigation as a means of creating understanding. As Tibet's religious leader, he strongly supports science and creates opportunities for monks to pursue scientific education" (Pringle, 2018).

*Kürşat Özenç, Ph.D. (Ritual Design Lab initiative at Stanford d.school and designer at SAP Labs)*

"The warmth of the mind was another intriguing concept. Dalai Lama mentioned that there was not a direct concept of warm-heartedness in the Tibetan language. Warm-heartedness is about motivation. It's the beginning point. The real challenge is about the warmth of the mind, which is about reframing and redirecting the emotions with a positive mind and attitude. He concluded that with

the mind (human intelligence) and heart together, you can get to infinite compassion" (Özenç, 2018).

## WHAT'S NEXT

Near the conclusion of the proceedings, the summit participants addressed the future of this gathering. The group, while diverse in some ways, leaned towards mid-career and older participants; and while somewhat racially and ethnically diverse, it was not close enough to the diversity we have and seek in our audiences and staffing. We also recognized that additional voices from other areas within museums and outside were desired. This closely paralleled the idea of "oneness" put forth by the Dalai Lama: specifically, that oneness is fundamentally not singularity, but rather plurality.

Participants strongly supported the idea of formalizing this group, either as an institution or as an annual event, with the goals of i) continually expanding our perspective and ii) further broadcasting the Dalai Lama's message to others. Clearly, there are practical limitations to meeting again in India; but I sensed that, although the Dalai Lama meeting served as the inspiring inception of this new initiative, the group as a whole felt that we have what we need to move forward on our own.

Evidence of that can be seen in the work done by small sub-groups on the last day of the conference. These groups addressed the following questions:

- How do we share/pass on what we have learned here to our colleagues in the museum field?
- How do we share/pass on what we have learned here to those who are outside the museum field (e.g. professionals in I.T., healthcare, etc.)?
- What sorts of tools/products can we design to promote the concept of compassion and empathy?
- What should be our strategy moving forward?

Each of the sub-groups arrived at some preliminary answers. Formalized commitments by each participant should yield clear methodologies. However, maintaining momentum may prove the greatest challenge to the group's collective efforts, even as our individual efforts provide direct or indirect impact.

In summary, when asked how this experience will impact my own work, I can give this answer: I've come to see the summit as part validation, part articulation, and part inspiration. Work in museums continually leads us to ask ourselves, "Why does this really matter?" The question itself begets a desire to see our efforts positively affect audiences—and ourselves. More than ever, I see a deep sense of purpose in the institutions I work with. The sum-



Figure 4. Group participants in background discussing museums and compassion at the Norbulingka Institute, the location of the third day of the proceedings on October 31, 2018. Temple dog remained unfazed by participants' brilliance (or inanity). Photo courtesy of the author

mit provided strong reinforcement for pursuing individual and social change, along with new ideas for accomplishing these goals. Museums see themselves as trusted and important providers of both education and social engage-

ment; our potential is vast, but still only partially fulfilled. The summit asked all of its participants to reflect on our work, asking what more we can do to build compassion and ethical behavior.

#### REFERENCES

Tenzin Saldon, *Tibet Museum and OOT DDC co-host Summit on Fostering Universal Ethics and Compassion*, Central Tibetan Administration web press release, October 2018.

Jim Wharton, *Fostering Empathy for Wildlife* Facebook Page, October 30, 2018.

Zorana Ivcevic Pringle, Ph.D. and Elif Gokcigdem, Ph.D., *Lessons in Leadership and Decision-making from the Dalai Lama*, <http://thehill.com>, November 22, 2018.

Kürşat Özenç, Ph.D., *Design and the Dalai Lama: Learnings from the Compassion Summit with the Dalai Lama*, <http://medium.com>, November 19, 2018.

*Seth Frankel is the Principal and Creative Lead, Studio Tectonic: Exhibition Design & Interpretive Planning, Boulder, Colorado USA, [www.studiotectonic.com](http://www.studiotectonic.com). He can be reached at [seth@studiotectonic.com](mailto:seth@studiotectonic.com).*

## BIOGRAPHY OF MUSEUM SUMMIT DELEGATES OCT. 28 -Nov. 1, 2018 DHARAMSALA, INDIA

### (INCLUDING MEMBERS OF THE TIBET MUSEUM)

Amir Baradaran, New York based Iranian-Canadian ARTificial artist and Creative Research Associate at Columbia University's Computer Science department, New York.

Makeba Clay, Inaugural Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) at The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

Orna Cohen, Co-Founder and Chief Creative Officer - Dialogue Social Enterprise (DSE).

Fred Dust, Former Senior Partner and Global Managing Director for the design firm IDEO.

Seth Frankel, Principal of Studio Tectonic (Boulder, Colorado, USA), Seth brings twenty-five years of experience to design and planning for museums, memorials and educational institutions.

Karleen Gardner, Director of Learning Innovation at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) and leads the Center for Empathy and the Visual Arts.

Elif M. Gokcigdem, Ph.D., Founder of Empathy-Building Through Museums Initiative.

Kate Goodall, Co-Founder and CEO of Halcyon, a non-profit dedicated to solving 21st century problems by providing space and access to emerging leaders in social entrepreneurship and the arts.

Dan Gottlieb, Hon ASLA, Director of Planning, Design & Museum Park, North Carolina Museum of Art.

Eliana (Ellie) Grossman, Research assistant in the Creativity and Emotions Lab at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, New Haven, Connecticut.

William T. Harris, President & CEO, Space Center Houston, Manned Space Flight Education Foundation and oversees the strategic direction of the nonprofit science and space exploration center, Space Center Houston.

Andreas Heinecke, Co-Founder and CEO - Dialogue Social Enterprise (DSE).

Philip Himberg, Artistic Director at Sundance Institute Theatre Program.

Zorana Ivcevic, Ph.D., Research Scientist at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, New Haven, Connecticut.

Andrea Jones, Independent consultant and educator known for her “outside the box” thinking.

Jon Kolkin, M.D., Co-chair of the Dalai Lama - North American Museum Summit, Dalai Lama - City of Raleigh Initiative, and the North Carolina - Museum of Compassion Initiative.

Emlyn Koster, Director at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences.

Kürşat özenç (Cure\_shot), Ph.D., Designer and innovation consultant at SAP Labs in Palo Alto, California. He leads the Ritual Design Lab initiative at Stanford d.school.

Tom Rockwell, Creative Director at the Exploratorium, San Francisco’s museum of science, art, and human perception.

Kevin Shelly, Facilities Technician at the Portland Children’s Museum.

Ruth Shelly, Executive Director, Portland Children’s Museum.

Elizabeth Silkes, Executive Director of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience.

Danielle St.Germain-Gordon, Chief Development Officer of the San Francisco Ballet .

Ngodup Tsering, Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to North America.

John Wetenhall, Founding director of the new George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum, serving also on the faculty of GW’s Graduate Program in Museum Studies.

Jim Wharton, Director Conservation Engagement & Learning, at the Seattle Aquarium.

Susie Wilkening, Principal at Wilkening Consulting.

Amelia Winger-Bearskin, Artist, technologist and community organizer.

Wendy Woon, Edward John Noble Foundation Deputy Director for Education at The Museum of Modern Art.



*Members of The Tibet Museum:*

Tashi Phuntsok, Director of the Tibet Museum.

Rinchen Dorjee, Deputy director and person in-charge of traveling exhibitions of the Tibet Museum.

Tenzin Topdhen, Digital production and program officer of the Tibet Museum.

Yeshe Wangmo, Project officer of the Tibet Museum.

Tenzin Youtso, Web and database manager where responsibilities include managing website and database as well as digitization and cataloging of the Tibet Museum's photo archives.

Kunga Choedon, Production and collection assistant at the Tibet Museum.

# THE INFORMAL LEARNING REVIEW

1776 KRAMERIA STREET, DENVER, COLORADO 80220

## ON THE COVER:

*London's Natural History Museum is evolving-- the skeleton of a stranded whale faces the modern world.*

*Full story on page 14.*

