



Summary of 2007 National Summit on Universal Design for Learning Working Groups

On November 8, 2007, an extraordinary group of individuals gathered in Washington, DC, to discuss the emergence of universal design for learning (UDL) as a positive influence on national, state, and district policy, teacher preparation and professional development, education publishing, research and development, philanthropy and, perhaps most importantly, the work of classroom teachers at the forefront of education reform.

The group convened with the understanding that for UDL to fulfill its promise to expand educational opportunities for all learners, the field needs to be “scaled up” in important ways. Participants set about to identify needs and opportunities for implementing universal design for learning across educational practice, policy, research, materials, and reform.

These 80+ individuals gathered in small working groups to discuss the Promise of UDL, Progress in the field, and Challenges facing the field, and to provide Recommendations for moving the UDL field forward in particular areas, as outlined by a Call to Action.

The following report synthesizes the responses of the UDL summit participants to these core questions. These responses are not the end of any discussion but rather represent the very beginning of a conversation for 2008 and beyond as we pursue greater equity and excellence in education through universal design for learning.

Promise of UDL

Participants generally agreed that universal design for learning is a field with great promise, specifically as it:

- Represents a fundamental shift in the way to think about learning and instruction from external organization of content to one built around the internal workings of the learner.
- Bridges general and special education to support all learners, taking into account and addressing the fact that different people learn differently, regardless of whether they have disabilities.
- Redirects attention to fixing the curriculum first rather than “fixing” the student.
- Emphasizes use of technology to improve learning rather than just access to physical environments (cf. universal design and assistive technology), so that the definition of flexible supports extends to cognitive, social, and intellectual supports in addition to physical and sensory ones.
- Offers a big-tent approach to education in which our commitment to educate “all” really does mean all. In this sense, helps meet ideals of *Brown v. Board of Education* and other landmark efforts to guarantee equal educational opportunity for all.
- Provides a framework to employ educational technologies, both inside and outside school, in ways that advance learning.
- May help maximize the potential of individual students in the general education classroom and perhaps reduce the number of special education placements.
- May help reduce drop out rates in high school and postsecondary settings by supporting more effective learning for all.
- Moves us past the medical model of disability to one that also considers the interaction of individuals with their environment, thereby requiring the environment to adapt to individual needs.
- May provide teachers with tools to make effective instructional decisions since UDL emphasizes progress monitoring to support data-driven decision making.

Progress in the UDL Field

Participants identified much progress in the field:

- A number of ongoing initiatives at building, district, and state levels—important “seed efforts” toward more system-wide implementations.
- Increasing awareness of UDL as a framework that applies to general education as well as special education—i.e., UDL as including universal design and assistive technology but also much more because of its emphasis on improving learning outcomes for all.

- Growing number of examples of districts that are training staff and teachers in UDL.
- The emergence of powerful, portable digital technologies makes the development of highly flexible, UDL-based learning environments on a large scale more realistic.
- The National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) and the new 15-state Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM) consortium lay important groundwork for the rapid development of flexible, UDL-based curricular materials.
- Industry interest in UDL as a promising approach.
- Current and past efforts to bring UDL into legislation (e.g., NCLB reauthorization) are raising awareness of it as a promising approach to educational reform.
- Stakeholders from policy and practice are becoming UDL advocates and actively taking ownership of the field.
- Growing awareness of the potential to apply UDL principles to large-scale assessment.

Challenges Facing the UDL Field

Participants identified a number of challenges, including:

- Need better marketing and communications about “universal design for learning”—distinguish it from frameworks that focus only on accessibility.
- Need funding for large-scale research and to create exemplars and models of UDL in practice.
- Need better documentation and dissemination of the research basis for UDL.
- Need school cultures that are capable and willing to implement a major shift in thinking about educational practice.
- Convincing overburdened teachers that UDL is not another “flavor of the month” initiative.
- Need for more teacher professional development, toolkits, and other supports for applying UDL.
- A lack of market-ready technologies—both hardware & software—that will make UDL possible on large scale.
- Convincing publishers of the market benefits of universally designed products.
- Need for authoring systems to help publishers create UDL-based products.
- Need to reach educators at the point of entry into the field, i.e., in pre-service education.
- Need for college and universities that embrace the “L” (for learning) in addition to the UD (universal design, a.k.a., accessibility).

- Need for more UDL references in policy and legislation—and in the right places (e.g., NCLB needs more UDL language in technology section).
- Current focus on large-scale assessments that fail to adequately measure what students really know and can do.

Recommendations of the Working Groups for Scaling Up the Field of UDL

Call to Action Point 1

Build bridges between general education and special education organizations so that all learners benefit from UDL innovations.

Table 1a

1. Strengthen research basis. New research will be costly; needs support from federal agencies and perhaps new public/private partnerships.
2. Strengthen links between existing research and UDL, present existing findings in practitioner-friendly ways, and explicitly tie UDL to other hot education topics. An online library of UDL exemplars from within content areas would be helpful.
3. Simplify the UDL message, using language that connects more obviously to general education concerns, and spread that message with “viral marketing” technologies like YouTube to permeate the culture.

Table 1b

1. Create a market for UDL by conducting a major media and marketing campaign to increase public awareness of UDL at different levels—parents and teachers, school boards, state and national policy leaders, business community, etc. Use new media tools and include compelling stories.
2. Develop model sites or pilot sites to demonstrate the scalability of UDL.

Call to Action Point 2

Incorporate UDL into local, state, and federal education policy planning and goals.

Table 2a

1. Work with national education organizations—general ed and special ed—to raise public awareness and disseminate accurate information about UDL (short term goal).
2. Convene regional summits of UDL implementers to share strategies and results (short term goal).

3. Work on the following district, state, and federal initiatives (in order of importance):
 - Secure a commitment to UDL from school boards;
 - Have states consider adding UDL to credentialing policies;
 - Have states develop policies for purchasing of instructional materials that support UDL principles;
 - Work to include in NCLB & IDEA reauthorizations specific recommendations for incorporating UDL into curriculum and instruction;
 - Work to have federal Title 1 dollars applied to teacher professional development for around UDL.
4. Create a National UDL TA&D Center to support public awareness campaign, teacher preparation and support, and state implementations.

Table 2b

1. Develop more communications/marketing materials in various media targeted at teachers, administrators, and policymakers as to what UDL is and what it looks like. These would include videos of UDL being applied in the classroom and a checklist for policymakers on what they can do to get UDL moving in their states (short term goal).
2. Develop a guide for states about what UDL implementation entails (short term goal).
3. Form a consortium of states to work together to incorporate UDL into state policy and to share knowledge about best practices (long term).
4. Work to incorporate UDL in the next IDEA reauthorization (long-term goal).

Call to Action Point 3

Raise the quality and number of education research projects that investigate UDL approaches to build on a growing empirical basis for UDL.

Table 3

1. Conduct more research for innovation and transformation—studies that develop and research UDL’s features and functionality—before jumping right into experimental or empirical studies.
2. Conduct research on the whole and on the parts of the curriculum. For example, researching how UDL works in content areas such as math and science, and across grade levels from preK to postsecondary.
3. Conduct research on UDL in the general education population that includes special-needs learners and results of which are disaggregated to demonstrate whether and to what extent UDL benefits all learners.
4. Build a community of researchers that helps identify priorities for UDL research, collaboration, perhaps through workshops and conferences.

5. Support a next generation of researchers and build research capacity for the field through graduate fellowship and postdoc programs in UDL.

Call to Action Point 4

Raise the quality and number of UDL-based curricular products so that educators and learners have the tools to overcome barriers and build on learner strengths.

Table 4a

1. Create development guidelines and a development toolkit to assist publishers with imbedding UDL principles during curriculum development.
 - Lower the barriers for developers
 - Explain UDL so that it can be understood from a developer/publisher perspective
 - Create a spreadsheet/matrix of technical solutions and challenges
2. Build and disseminate an evidence base (What works? ... for whom? ... why does it work?) to support the development of UDL products.
3. Sharpen the UDL message by determining the “one thing” that does not require much explanation that would make buy-in a no-brainer.
4. Build market demand for UDL by launching a public information campaign using Web 2.0 tools and other means to help the public (parents, etc) and educators better understand and implement UDL.

Table 4b

1. Develop and release guidelines for developers to provide a shared definition of the UDL teaching and learning process.
2. Develop a UDL training module to demonstrate how the guidelines would be implemented.
3. Integrate UDL with the Partnership for 21st Century Skills framework and other compatible frameworks to grow awareness and understanding of UDL benefits.
4. Explore ways to deliver UDL learning environments directly to kids, perhaps through software, games, websites, etc., so that they understand themselves as learners and advocate for UDL themselves.

Call to Action Point 5

Prepare and sustain K-12 and postsecondary educators to implement UDL.

Table 5a

1. Need to infuse UDL into more teacher education programs and professional development programs, both in special education and general education.
2. Need to communicate the message better—define what UDL is, what it is not—and provide clear models of what UDL looks like.
3. Do more to bridge general and special education in addressing teachers. There is a great need for a common language around UDL, so that it's clearly understood. UDL is about providing great public schools for all children.
4. Develop learning communities of teachers and postsecondary faculty to share best practices, support and sustain one another, and build support for systemic change around UDL.

Table 5b

1. Solidify the principles and standards of UDL and widely disseminate these through a media and marketing campaign.
2. Strengthen the research base on whole school implementation.

Call to Action Point 6

Apply UDL to assessment—both formative and summative—so that learner progress is measured in accurate ways and informs instructional improvements.

Table 6

1. Reach and educate parents about the purposes, uses, and designs of large-scale assessment in order to build grassroots support for UDL implementation in assessment.
2. Encourage the incorporation of progress monitoring into learning environments—both in instruction and in curricular materials development—a way to measure and improve student progress as a matter of course.
3. Support inclusion of UDL language in state and federal policies around assessment.
4. Build a research base to demonstrate the validity and reliability of UDL-based tests, including models of such assessments that are replicable and scalable.

Call to Action Point 7

Implement UDL in settings that support lifelong learning, informal learning, workplace training, and other instructional venues and situations, so that all learners will have adequate opportunities to learn for success, satisfaction, and personal achievement.

Table 7

1. Engage federal agencies other than those represented at the Summit, including Departments of Labor, Defense, and Health and Human Services; general education divisions of US DOE; etc., to expand a vision and funding for UDL initiatives in other areas, including job training, vocational education, etc.
2. Partner with large corporations and international organizations to scale up distribution of UDL-based media worldwide and give UDL a global reach.
3. Engage stakeholders not represented at the Summit, especially students and parents, so that they understand that a traditional curriculum and learning environment is not the only option and so they can advocate for change.