Dear colleagues,

The podcast you are about to listen to is about an online learning platform called the Learner Web (LW). The LW was originally developed as a self-study environment for adult learners who left high school without a diploma and were pursuing a GED.

Today, the LW is used in many other contexts, for instance in the university-based ESL and University Studies programs, and in library and community Adult Basic Education settings. The LW can be understood of a network of geographical and topical nodes, called “regions.” These regions consist of learning plans, which provide the learner with learning goals, internal and external materials, and with opportunities to connect with offline learning opportunities in the learner’s local community. Much of the LW’s contents are designed for guided self-study, but instructors, tutors, and tech support are there to assist the learner.

The podcast is an excerpt from a 30-minute interview (originally recorded March 30th, 2010) with Professor Stephen Reder, Principal Investigator of the Learner Web. The interview was edited to fit the specifications of the podcast, and the following terms are used during the interview:

- IELP: Portland State’s Intensive English Language Program for international students
- ESL: English as a Second Language, that is English learned in a country where the language is natively spoken (as opposed to EFL, English as a Foreign Language)
- Learning Plan: A study unit on the LW. A learning plan consists of study instructions, resources, and support materials.
- Region: an independently administrated organizational node with a distinct geographical or topical delineation

Conclusion

The LW is a very young program, so much of Professor Reder and my conversation focused on the origins of the project, current challenges, and Professor Reder’s vision for the future. The LW is spreading fast across the United States, with the state of New York being the newest partner in the project. Currently the LW serves college students, adult basic learners, immigrants, and is also used to train LW staff. Future plans include the expansion of the LW, new target audiences, and the use of new technologies such as social networking sites and mobile platforms.

Professor Reder was a wonderful interviewee and took the time to respond to all my questions in depth and great detail. As a consequence, the pace of the interview is rather slow, and fewer
questions could be included in the podcast. I hope the podcast provides an interesting and coherent excerpt. Information from the rest of the interview will be included in my case study, but if you would like to listen to the interview in full length, please let me know.