An instructional environment for learning to solve legal cases: PROSA

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Preface

Why law students experience difficulties with learning to solve legal cases intrigued me. Being able to do research on this subject has been a pleasure from the start. Although the thesis is finished, I plan to continue my research. For one, PROSA will be extended with more cases in the domain of administrative law; secondly, PROSA will be re-used for other legal domains of practice as criminal adjective law and private international law.

It cannot be emphasized enough that efficient and effective learning benefits from well designed and properly evaluated instructional materials. Law Faculties are confronted with new technologies that may be used in the legal curriculum. However, both policy makers and teachers should be aware that introducing new technologies in (legal) education for the purpose of enhancing students’ performance requires that materials be properly developed. This requires a structural policy on the use of these technologies in which both time and money are made available to design the materials. Besides that, the implementation of these materials in the existing, or even new, courses should be carefully planned in advance.

Many people have supported me in many different ways. Hereby I want to give them credit. However, I have to limit myself to the main acknowledgments.

First of all I want to thank my supervisor Joost Breuker. He gave me the freedom to produce and work out my own ideas. Later on he enthusiastically guided the scientific process and thoroughly assessed the product.

A small subsidy made it possible to appoint a programmer to assist me with the implementation of PROSA. I want to thank Jelmer Jellema who worked on the project from September 1997 - December 1998. Unfortunately he had to give priority to finishing his studies. He was replaced by Jolanda Groothuismink for the remainder of the time (January 1998 - December 1998). It has been a great pleasure working with her, and I want to thank her for her contribution.
I also want to thank Irvette Koorn - van Hunen who was appointed for the period September 1999 – December 1999 to assist with the extension of the number of cases in PROSA.

I want to thank Henny Troostwijk, Oswald Jansen and Arnout Klap (former) researchers and teachers at the department of administrative law of the Faculty of Law at the University of Amsterdam for checking the materials.

Thanks are also due to the 26 law students and the 4 legal practitioners who were willing to participate in the think aloud experiment. I specifically want to thank Alexandra Duyvis who helped me with transcribing the protocols.

Thanks are also in place for the 8 law students who participated in the developmental test and to the many law students who participated in the field test. Cor van Dijkum is thanked for his advice with regard to the statistics.

I want to thank my friends and colleagues in the field of Computer Science and Law and in the field of Computer Assisted Legal Instruction in the Netherlands and abroad. I specifically want to thank Otto Kamstra, Radboud Winkels, André Valente, Nienke den Haan and Paul Maharg.

I want to thank Dorien DeTombe, already for twenty years my companion in life. We did many ‘projects’ together, raising our two sons being our favorite one. We are already engaged in new projects and planning many more.

Finally I want to thank my two beautiful sons Claudius de Wilde de Ligny and Vincent de Wilde de Ligny and my two ‘daughters in law’ Lottie Hoeve and Nienke Slob just for being part of my life.

Antoinette Muntjewerff

Amsterdam, September 2000