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Intentional and institutional self-corrections: An outline for building ordonomic competencies in schools

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Stefan Hielscher

Intentional and Institutional Self-Corrections: An Outline for Building Ordonomic Competencies in Schools

Diskussionspapier Nr. 2024-07

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Kurzfassung

In diesem Beitrag wird untersucht, wie Schulen die Entwicklung von Privat-, Wirtschaftsund Staatsbürgern durch Prozesse der intentionalen und institutionellen Selbstkorrektur
fördern können. Basierend auf dem ordonomischen Ansatz, der Individualethik und Institutionenethik auf besondere Weise miteinander verbindet, wird die Notwendigkeit der
Förderung von Selbstaufklärungs- und Selbststeuerungsfähigkeiten betont. Anhand von
Beispielen aus dem Modell des selbstgesteuerten Lernens der "Acton Academy" wird
veranschaulicht, wie Schüler Tugenden wie Resilienz, Verantwortungsbewusstsein und
Fehlertoleranz kultivieren können, die im Konzept des Growth Mindset (Wachstumsdenkens) eingebettet sind. Zudem wird das Zusammenspiel zwischen individuellem und kollektivem Selbstmanagement hervorgehoben, bei dem die Lernenden aktiv an der Regelsetzung und Regelreform ihres Lernumfeld mitwirken. Die These des Beitrags lautet, dass
mithilfe dieser Kompetenzen die Schüler besser auf ein aktives und konstruktives privates, wirtschaftliches und staatsbürgerliches Engagement in der Gesellschaft vorbereitet
werden.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Lernen, Wachstumsdenken, Acton Academy, Ordonomik, Privatbürger, Wirtschaftsbürger, Staatsbürger

Abstract

This paper explores how schools can foster the development of citizenship through processes of intentional and institutional self-corrections. It discusses the ordonomic approach, which combines individual and institutional ethics, emphasizing the need for education systems to promote self-enlightenment and self-governance skills. Through examples from Acton Academy's self-directed learning model, it illustrates how students can cultivate virtues like resilience, responsibility, and tolerance for error, as embedded in the concept of growth mindsets. The paper also highlights the interplay between individual and collective self-management, where learners actively participate in rule setting and rule reforms for their learning environment. By fostering these competencies, the paper suggests that students can be better prepared for active civic and political engagement in society.

Keywords: Learning, growth mindset, Acton Academy, ordonomics, private citizenship, economic citizenship, political citizenship

Intentional and Institutional Self-Corrections: An outline for building ordonomic competencies in schools

Stefan Hielscher

1. Introduction

This paper explores the role of intentional and institutional self-corrections in cultivating private, economic and civic (political) citizenship within school environments. Addressing the societal need for autonomous citizens capable of reason, the paper argues that education systems should prioritize practicing skills and competencies that enable self-enlightenment and self-governance at both individual and collective levels. Using the Acton Academy's reform-based pedagogical model as an illustrative case, this paper investigates how an iterative process of intentional and institutional self-corrections can enhance students' character virtues, such as resilience, tolerance for error, and personal responsibility.

This study builds upon the ordonomic approach, which integrates individual ethics and institutional ethics within educational settings, underscoring how these combined elements contribute to managing societal functions in a competitive, modern landscape. From an ordonomic perspective (cf. Pies 2024, Hielscher 2024), designing education systems and material is based on specific diagnosis and an according therapy. The diagnosis is two-fold: First, (future) citizens are, on one hand, morally overburdened as private individuals. This excessive demand arises as social expectations encourage citizens to overcome systemic challenges – climate change, biodiversity, animal welfare, etc. – by adopting a different set of goals, or intentions, to prompt behavioral change (intentional self-correction). On the other, (future) citizens are being inadequately prepared to act as political or civic actors in society. The reason for that is a lack of constructive guidance on how to set in motion rule-reform processes that aim at changing institutional incentives for collective action (institutional self-corrections). From an ordonomic perspective, the therapy is to categorize institutional self-corrections as a fundamental challenge and focus more on it in the class room.

Through an examination of Acton Academy's self-directed learning environment, this paper demonstrates how embedding ordonomic principles in educational settings fosters skills and competencies that allow students to navigate and contribute positively to society by preparing them for civic participation within functional, competitive social systems.

The paper proceeds in four steps: First, I will present a concrete example of disruptive education – the self-directed method of learning practiced by Acton Academy. Second, I will reconstruct the functionality of this method using analytical instruments of the ordonomic research program. This primarily involves analyzing and addressing the interdependencies and discrepancies between feelings, ideas, and institutions to which ordonomics is committed. Based on this ordonomic reconstruction, my argument will be that Acton Academy practices competences of (self-)enlightenment and (self-)governance on two levels: on the level of self-management of individual learning and on the level of self-governance of the collective learning community(ies). Third, I will use the ordonomic reconstruction to demonstrate how an iterative process of intentional and institutional

self-corrections can develop ordonomic (self-)enlightenment and (self-)governance competences in self-management and self-governance. This process promotes the development and practice of character virtues using elements of individual ethics and institutional ethics, both of which are conducive to the institutional management of competitive social systems.

2. Acton Academy

I start with presenting a concrete example of self-directed learning, a method of learning and education developed and practiced by "Acton Academy" (Sandefer, 2018, https://www.actonacademy.org, hereinafter: Acton Method). Acton Academy is a case of private and disruptive education, which has been tested in the U.S. and around the world – although primarily in the English-speaking countries and largely outside central Europe and the German-speaking world – for more than 15 years. As I will show later, Acton Academy can be reconstructed as using a method that promotes competencies viewed as critical from the ordonomic approach to social theory.

The Acton method is founded on the understanding that every child, and every person for that matter, possess a unique talent. To discover and develop their talent, children and learners need a suitable learning environment ('enabling environment') that Acton Academy aims to provide. Acton Academy's promise is then to support learners on their "Hero's Journey" using the Socratic Method and approaches of experiential learning. Their untiring ambition is formulated in Acton's mission: "We believe each person who enters our doors deserves to find a calling and change the world." (https://www.actonmain.org)

In a similar way, an Acton parent who had sent her daughter to Acton elementary school noted:

"I would never have believed children could learn so much from each other... until I saw it with my own eyes. The lessons of self-management and self-governance have prepared our fifth-grade daughter to be a lifelong learner." (https://www.actonmain.org)

Acton Academy's self-understanding is to support a "learning revolution" around four constitutive pillars:

- "1. Adaptive game-based programs for core skills
 - 2. Socratic discussions to strengthen critical thinking
 - 3. Hands-on real-world projects
- 4. Life changing apprenticeships" (https://www.actonacademy.org)

¹ Cf. Sandefer (2017). Cf., also, the promo invitation to parents by Acton Academy Austin, Texas, that underlines their ambition to revolutionize education: "Are you on a mission to find an extraordinary school environment for your extraordinary child? Do you wish your child had more time to do things they are passionate about rather than do homework or take standardized tests? If so, come see how an education revolution is turning learning upside down. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/open-house-tickets-1003920803147?aff=oddtdtcreator

While the Acton method features various innovative aspects that deserve further elaboration, I will focus here on aspects that relate to the elements of "self-management and self-governance" that are of particular relevance for the ordonomic approach. Drawing on James M. Buchanan (1975), the process of acculturating young learners in an Acton's enabling environment of self-management and self-governance can suitably be structured into two phases: a constitutional and post-constitutional phase.

2.1 Constitutional phase: ,Building the tribe'

I will start with the constitutional phase. Upon entering an Acton Academy (as well as at each transition from primary to middle school, and from middle to launchpad), learners discuss and adopt some basic framework settings for their learning community, initially in close consultation with parents² and learning guides (primary school), later much more independently (middle school and launchpad). The framework includes three elements of an enabling environment: ((1)) the physical learning environment, ((2)) the digital learning environment and ((3)) the institutional learning environment.

- ((1)) Physical learning environment: The physical learning environment is designed according to Maria Montessori's learning concept. Montessori's idea was (and, in the Montessori method still is), to create a so-called 'prepared environment' in which learners can find and organize their learning experience as autonomously as possible. Learners are organised in mixed-age groups ('studios') of up to 35 learners, one learning group per primary and middle school, and launchpad, as well as in mixed-age learning teams of two. Each studio is supported by two guides.
- ((2)) Digital learning environment. The Acton method extends Maria Montessori's physical concept of a 'prepared environment' into the digital world. The Acton methods heavily relies on a prepared digital learning environment, and provides it to all learners on an optional basis. Core skills (e.g., in primary school) are primarily taught using online learning tools, such as in maths (Khan Academy), writing (Typing Club) or reading (Lexia). These apps provide a prepared learning environment on a digital platform, im Grunde ganz im Geist von Maria Montessori.³
- ((3)) *Institutional learning environment*. The 'Student contract' forms the final, institutional element of the Acton method's enabling learning environment. Each learner binds herself to the promise to collectively discuss and agree on principles that promote their personal and collective quest for talent and mastery ("Hero's journey"). These principles fulfil two functions: First, they facilitate the practice of developing a growth mindset

² On the challenges for parents who enter into such a contract, cf. Lencioni (2008).

³ The Landesverband Montessori Bayern, for example, one of the leading Montessori associations in Germany with the leading Montessori training academy in Germany, defines the concept of a 'prepared environment' as follows: "The prepared environment is therefore the physical and psychological space in which the child takes the decisive steps in his or her spiritual and mental growth. It is the central place and the psychosocial framework in which the development of mind and character can succeed." This definition would certainly include the digital environment. However, neither at Montessori Bavaria nor in practice at Montessori schools in Germany there is a strong interest to use elements of online education. Cf. https://www.montessoribayern.de/landesverband/paedagogik/m-paedagogik-die-bereiche/die-vorbereitete-umgebung

among young learners. A growth mindset, according to Dweck (2015) on which the Acton method relies, is defined in contrast to a fixed mindset:

"In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment. ... In a fixed mindset, people believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent, are simply fixed traits. They spend their time documenting their intelligence or talent instead of developing them. They also believe that talent alone creates success—without effort."

Developing a growth mindset – while avoiding the pitfalls of a fixed mindset – requires continuous practice with supportive routines that develop habits, and finally, character traits and virtues for learners. The virtues include fault tolerance, eagerness to learn, resilience, leadership, personal responsibility, helpfulness and self-care ('Hero's Journey'). Second, these principles of self-directed learning encourage each learner to avoid 'vices' that support a 'fixed mindset' and inhibit a fault-tolerant and self-reliant learning community. These 'vices' may include status seeking, arrogance, victimhood, lack of personal responsibility, error avoidance, etc. The institutional environment guides the process of intentional self-correction of intuitions and feelings that hinder learning.

We can now clearly characterize the link between all three aspects of a prepared learning environment within the Acton method. Of course, the (external) design of the physical learning environment has a long tradition, going back to Maria Montessori, and is not innovative in and by itself. The same applies to the participatory self-design of the institutional learning environment, which also plays a role in other reform concepts of learning, such as the 'democratic school' in Central Europe (https://eudec.org). Digital learning environments are also widely promoted. Acton Academy's innovation therefore lies not so much in each of the elements, but in their specific integration. This integration allows offers three benefits: First, Acton Academy extends Maria Montessori's concept of a prepared learning environment to the world of digital learning. Second, the use of online learning tools enables a genuine reinterpretation and conceptualization of the teacher as a learning guide. The invaluable support of online learning apps allows the guide to follow through with the 'Socratic Method' and its code of conduct.⁵ This means that the guide never answers a question ("Never answer a question, no matter how practical or necessary", Sandefer 2018, p. 98), because most content-related questions about right and wrong (in Math's, for example) are answered by the apps. Third, human resources are unlocked to be used for supporting the student process of self-directed learning and self-governance of the institutional learning environment. As will become more obvious in the next section, the last two aspects are of critical importance in the postconstitutional phase.

⁴ Cf. also Dweck (2007) and Coyne (2009).

⁵ The Socratic code of conduct states that learning guides should not answer students' questions, but only support the individual and collective learning process by asking well-informed questions. See Sandefer (2018, p. 98).

2.2 Post-constitutional phase: Order into chaos, chaos into order

Let me know reflect on the post-constitutional phase: In the everyday classroom, the learners themselves take responsibility for the processes of self-management of individual learning and self-governance of the learning studio. In other words: Students shape and design the 'rules' that support the implementation of the very principles they have adopted themselves in the first place. Regarding self-management, students are free (within limits) to determine their learning objectives, learning speed or learning media when practicing core skills (math's, reading and writing in primary school, for example).⁶ Regarding self-governance, students are responsible for the collective organization of the learning environment ('studio'), including the performance of tasks such as cleaning or rubbish disposal. In this post-constitutional phase, learners discuss and reflect on the implementation of the rules in the learning studio as required (e.g., Who is allowed to choose his/her learning objectives and learning resources? Under what conditions? With how many degrees of freedom? Who is responsible for cleaning and when?). Discussions about the status of implementation of the studio contract take place at weekly 'town hall meetings', where rules are discussed and decided. The self-administration of both rule aspects – the individual learning rules of self-management and the collective rules of selfgovernance for the entire learning studio – are explicitly assigned to the students.

The associated individual and collective freedom to choose requires the sensitive coaching of guides, who see themselves as Socratic teachers. Socratic teachers encourage a high degree of personal responsibility for collective learning from experience using Socratic questions, which, according to the Acton founders, follows a recurring logic: 'chaos into order and back'. The goal is to moderate the iterative process of anarchy and order, not to prevent it. Socratic questions enable students to test alternative rule arrangements through trial and error, and they help transform anarchy into order, learning from the consequences of their individual and collective rule decisions for the next round of actions and interaction:

- Guides support each student's self-directed learning path of developing core skills (such as math's, reading or writing in the primary school studio). Have students each kept their own learning promises? Guides also provide guardrails: they organize regular check-ins that invite learners to document and review their learning progress, for example within the online learning apps. The goal is to understand and monitor whether students have lived up to their individual, sometimes weekly, learning promises. As the Socratic code of conduct does not permit any interventionist measures, learning guides use questions to direct students toward alternative self-management arrangements, and redress where necessary.
- Guides support the collective self-governance of the learning studio. Have students
 honored their collective promises made in the student contract? Guides support
 students to address any rule violations in weekly town hall discussions and organize majorities for any rule reforms using the power of judgement and persuasion.
 In matters of self-governance, guides also work with questions to invite students

⁶ Freedom in the choice of learning objectives, content and speed is now a fundamental function in the use of digital learning media. Well-utilised digital learning media empower learners to determine their own learning path on the one hand and, on the other, free teachers from the role of the "tamer," so to speak, who are forced to teach all learners uniformly in lockstep according to a curriculum, regardless of their individual abilities and competence levels. Cf. for example Kahn (2012).

to experiment with alternative rule arrangements. For example, Sandefer had suggested introducing quasi-monetary incentives ('Eagle Bucks') to make compliance with rules of conduct more tangible for students. Sometimes, rewards can be useful for individual and collective compliance with rules and hard work (distribution of Eagle Bucks) and sometimes, penalties (withdrawal of Eagle Bucks) for rule violations. Eagle Bucks are quasi-monetary because they can be exchanged for material and immaterial benefits (such as biscuits or degrees of freedom in learning). The whole process is governed by learners for learners.

In conclusion, the relationship between the constitutional and post-constitutional phases can be characterized as follows. If one considers the content of both phases in context – the constitutional contract as the result of phase 1 (Student Contract) and the post-constitutional contract as the task of phase 2 (self-management and self-governance) –, then it becomes clear that the constitutional contract fulfils an important orientation and binding function for many post-constitutional challenges: As students discuss the Studio Contract collectively and adopt it by (almost) unilateral agreement, deviation is interpreted as a breach of trust, which encourages students to set in motion a self-governance process of rule reforms. These institutional self-corrections aim to harmonize the lived practice of the learning community with the constitutional contract. The interdependency between the constitutional and post-constitutional phases is even clearer when one embarks on an ordonomic reconstruction of Acton Academy's institutional learning environment, which is the subject of the next chapter.

3. How the Acton method works: An ordonomic reconstruction

I will reconstruct the Acton method using elements of the analytical toolkit of ordonomics, which specializes in the analysis and management of interdependencies and discrepancies between feelings, ideas and institutions. I proceed in four steps: (1) First, I reconstruct the problems of self-commitment and their institutional solution regarding the self-management of individual learning, then (2) the problems of self-commitment regarding the self-governance of learning communities and their institutional solution. Finally, I analyze (3) solutions within the three-tiered ordonomic framework of governance, which helps analyze the levels of rule-finding and rule setting, and in particular their relationship. In the final step (4), I argue that, in principle, the Acton method supports intentional self-corrections that help correct fixed mindsets and develop growth mindsets that promote learning. I interpret this as a self-correction of individual virtues and vices that is well grounded in and informed by institutional ethics.

3.1 Self-management of individual learning

From an ordonomic perspective, the self-management of individual learning can be interpreted as a self-commitment problem of the learning individual towards herself. The learner is conceived and reconstructed as a contractual subject at two different points in time, whereby the future self (ego_{tomorrow or tw}) enters into a contract with the present self (ego_{today or td}). Ego_{tw} invests in the relationship with Ego_{td}, formulates realistic learning

⁷ Cf. Pies (2022), Pies, Beckmann and Hielscher (2009), Pies and Hielscher (2013) and Pies (2020).

goals and organizes the necessary learning environment. Ego_{tw}, on the other hand, promises Ego_{td} to achieve the initial learning goals at some point in the future using tools as selected. From a game-theoretical perspective, this is a sequential game of a one-sided prisoner's dilemma type. Each player faces two strategy options: Ego_{td} invests in an adequate learning environment or not (invest: yes/no), while Ego_{tw} fulfils his/her learning promises or not, i.e., undertakes the time-consuming efforts required to achieve the learning success (effort: yes/no). The ordinal payoffs shown in Fig. 1 represent the result of the individual advantage and disadvantage calculations of Ego_{td} and Ego_{tw}, where 2 > 1 > 0 > -1.

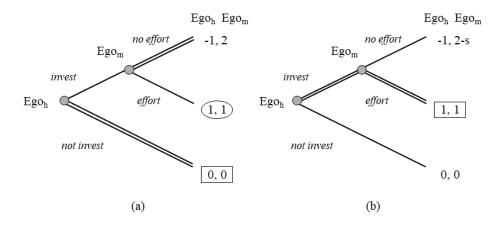


Figure 1: The self-management problem as a one-sided prisoner's dilemma Source: Own representation based on Pies et al. (2009; p. 383).

The challenge in this situation is a problem of time inconsistency. Despite good intentions, Ego_{td} is subject to incentives not to pursue the goals set forth by herself as there are more attractive options to use time during contract fulfilment: gaming, media consumption, distraction or procrastination. Ego_{tw} will therefore tend to violate her learning promises (2 > 1). Using backward induction, this might have negative repercussions for Ego_{td}: He/she will tend to refrain from learning investments that might be useful but otherwise costly (0 > -1). Speaking in institutional terms, this would correspond to a breach of the constitutional contract (student contract). The learner does fails to fulfil the goals and promises he/she has made. From a psychological point of view, it disturbs the student's self-esteem and their perception of identity: Those who regularly fail to keep promises to themselves lose self-confidence, which is a major obstacle during the formative phase of personality development.

How does the Acton method help overcome this problem of poor self-commitment? From a game theoretical perspective, Acton institutionalizes a self-commitment s and make it credible by monitoring, disclosure and sanctioning of any violations of individual learning promises, while sanctioning can be positive, in case of a reward for rule compliance, and negative, in case of punishment (cf. Pies, Hielscher, Beckmann 2009). In the end, the incentive effect of such self-commitment must be suitable to make the learning efforts of Ego_{tw} (effort) more attractive than slack (no effort). This means: 1 > 2-s. To do so, the Acton method provides for the following self-binding mechanisms:

⁸ On the one-sided prisoner's dilemma, cf. Kreps (1990) and Greif (2000).

- The student contract provides overarching guidance. It contains the fundamental promise to invest in learning, even if obstacles should arise on the learning path: "I am on a Hero's Journey. Even though hard times, I will not give up because I have courage. I will be honest with myself and others about the way I lead this journey. I will try my hardest to reach all my goals and I will make new goals as well. I will try new things I have never done before, even things I might not be good at, to discover new talents" (Sandefer 2018; p. 179).
- The learning guide and peer learners make self-commitments to learning promises more credible as they remind each learner of the consequences and, in case of doubt, help enforce them. By honoring or not honoring self-commitments, learners may experience additional advantages or disadvantages, such as a higher or lower degrees of freedom in choosing the learning environment. In the case of the guides, the binding effects relate to the specific, sometimes weekly, individual learning promises made by students to themselves; in the case of peers, to the collective learning promises made in the Student Contract. For example, peers manage the Eagle Buck incentive system and thus the positive and negative sanctions fellow learners (should) impose according to the learner's performance in the spirit of the Student Contract.

3.2 Self-governance of collective learning communities

From a collective perspective, there is another problem that is closely linked to the self-management of individual learning. How does Acton Academy ensure that everyone fulfils the collective promises set out in the student contract? What does a functional system of student self-governance look like? From an ordonomic perspective, this self-governance problem of collective learning can be interpreted as a problem of collective self-commitment of all learners.

From a game-theoretical perspective, the logic of incentives can be illustrated with a coordination game. For the sake of simplicity, I am modelling a learning studio with two learners, L₁ and L₂. Both are faced with a choice of whether to honor their learning promises agreed upon in the student contract (honor promises: yes/no). If students honor their promises, a state of external and internal order prevails in the learning studio: The learners focus on developing core skills, tidy up the studio, keep quiet when necessary and support each other in solving learning challenges. If the learning promises are violated, distractions of all kinds are ubiquitous and the learning studio will likely descend into anarchy: Core competencies are neglected, books and laptops lie on the floor, noise disrupts the learning experience, learners are busy playing video games and have little time and energy to support their peers. There is strategic interdependency between the available strategy combinations: L₁'s choice has consequences for the cost-benefit calculation of L₂, and vice versa. Again, the ordinal payoffs shown in Figure 2 are the result of

⁹ This is, of course, a grossly simplistic and unrealistic assumption, as learning communities consist of groups with more than two learners. However, the coordination game with n players has the same logic as a 2-person game, namely the direction of the incentive effect, which encourages the players in both games to choose their strategy decisions in a way that one of the two Pareto-superior Nash equilibria will result. What is different is the process, as experiments show. For example, situational factors – including the number of people – influence the process of coordination in n-player games. Cf. Battalio et al. (2001), Schmidt et al. (2003) and Belloc et al. (2019).

the individual cost-benefit considerations of L_1 and L_2 , with 4 > 3 > 2 > 1. The arrows indicate the direction of the incentive effects.

Question: Keep collective learning promises?

 L_2 L_2 yes yes no no Ι IV ΙV Ι ves yes 4, 4 1.3 4, 4 1.3 L_I L_{I} 20 20 2, 2 3, 1 2-s, 2-s 3.1 III ΙΙ Ш ΙΙ (a) (b)

Figure 2: The self-governance problem as a coordination game

Source: Own representation based on Pies et al. (2009; p. 384).

The above payoff options illustrate the consequences of L_1 's strategic consideration, which I interpret as a coordination game or stage-hunt game: If L_2 sticks to his/her learning promises and thus contributes to the external and internal order of the learning studio, L_1 also has incentives to maintain order and avoid anarchy (4 > 3). If, on the other hand, L_1 observes anarchic tendencies in L_2 , which increases the risks of the learning studio falling into chaos, L_1 also finds it difficult to learn. It then seems better for him/her to pursue behaviors that at least allow for short-term pleasures, but hinder learning as well (2 > 1). Since the same incentives apply to L_2 , this coordination game has two Pareto-optimal equilibria in mixed strategies, as the outcome depends on the initial action of one of the players. Quadrant I describe the equilibrium of "order." Quadrant III describes the equilibrium of "anarchy." However, III is Pareto-dominated by I because I is associated with better learning experiences and thus career prospects for students than III.

How does the Acton concept help to overcome this self-governance problem of learning communities? In game-theoretical terms, a credible self-commitment s is institutionalized to make the strategy of 'keeping collective learning promises' more attractive than the alternative. The condition for this is: 2-s > 1. If such a self-commitment is credible, the state of anarchy is deprived of its equilibrium conditions and the state of order becomes the sole, Pareto-optimal equilibrium of this game. The Acton method provides for the following self-binding mechanisms:

• Similar to self-management, the student contract also provides overarching orientation in this case. The student contract contains the fundamental promise to undertake collective learning efforts. In addition, promises are formulated to show leadership and support peer learners to keep their learning promises: "I will encourage other people on their journeys but make sure they want and need my help. I will take care of the things around me that help me learn and live" (Sandefer (2018; p. 179).

In principle, these collective learning promises are realized through respectful 'peer accountability'. This means it lies in each learner's responsibility to monitor compliance with the studio rules, disclose rule violations and sanction them, for example by communicating their respect for rule compliance or disregard in case of rule violations. Such 'face-to-face' self-binding mechanisms are supported by rules discussed and agreed upon by all learners. However, also guides can initiate self-binding innovations in an effort to re-establish order. For example, guides introduced a chip system based on Eagle Bucks, which largely delegates rule sanctioning to an anonymous system, which relieved peer learners of the burden to monitor rules personally. Founder Laura Sandefer describes this system as follows: "[We] designed and introduced a crude economic system based on poker chips [and] ... organized the Eagles [middle school learners] into three-person squads. Each Eagle received three chips per week. Each infraction of studio rules that governed 'listening' or 'respect' triggered the loss of a chip. If everyone wasn't in place for the opening discussion at 8:30 a.m. or the studio wasn't in pristine order by the 3:00 p.m. closing, everyone lost a chip. If every member of the squad had a chip on Friday, the entire squad received a treat." (Sandefer 2018; p. 102).

3.3 Self-enlightenment and self-administration in self-management and self-governance of a learning community

I will now try to make sense of the self-commitment mechanisms at Acton Academy using the 3-tiered ordonomic framework. It distinguishes between three arenas of interactions: A basic game of rule-following, in which people act according to the given incentives; a meta-game of rule-setting, in which rule arrangements, and their incentive effects for the basic game, are being decided; and a meta-meta-game of rule-finding, in which actors discuss alternative rule arrangements and their subsequent effects. When applying the three-tiered ordonomic framework, the question at hand is relevant. The specific research question determines which interaction is interpreted as a basic game, and subsequently as a meta game and meta-meta game.

In the case of collective self-administration of learning, the relevant question is this: How can students organize a learning studio collectively where each learner finds a suitable and enabling environment? In this case, the basic game is determined by the logic of the above-illustrated coordination game – in a simplified 2-player version – for all learners in the studio. Here, students carry out their actions under given incentives and in strategic interdependence. This can lead to either order or anarchy. Students discuss any anarchic tendencies and alternative rule arrangements to restore order in the meta-meta game, i.e., in weekly town hall meetings. These meetings also fulfil the function of a rulesetting process in the meta-meta game, insofar as they are used to vote on rule reforms. The arrows in Figure 3a symbolize the self-governance activities that are relevant from an ordonomic perspective, promoting the learning process of a self-directed learning community: (1) self-administration of incentives and their adaptation using rule reforms and (2) self-enlightenment about the possibility of realizing positive-sum games through rule reforms (win-win). Arrow (3) illustrates the supportive – i.e., accompanying, but not interventionist – orientation provided by the guides who constructively implement the learning process of student self-administration and self-enlightenment. This includes, for example, encouraging learners to think critically and establish suitable rules that enable Socratic discussions.¹⁰ Part of these discourse rules are the "Socratic Discussion rules of engagement" which include the following elements: "Be on time and prepared. Listen intently. Take a stand. Build on previous comments. Be concise. Provide evidence and examples." (Sandefer (2017, p. 187). The provocative, action-guiding question of Socratic discussions is: "Would you rather be right or be surprised?"¹¹

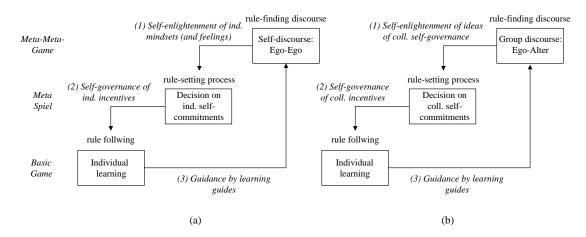


Figure 3: The process of self-enlightenment and self-administration in the self-management (3a) and self-governance (3b) of learning. Source: Own representation based on Pies et al. (2009; p. 386).

In the case of self-management of individual learning, the question is different: How can the individual learning process be organized? How can each learner take best advantage of her learning windows of opportunity, achieve learning goals and develop talents? Here, the basic game is determined by the logic of the above-explained one-sided prisoner's dilemma, in which the learner 'plays' with him/herself, so to speak. Here, too, actions are carried out in the basic game under given incentives, which may or may not lead to a successful learning process. The arena for discussion (meta-meta game) and establishing self-commitments (meta game) are the weekly check-ins each learner completes with a guide. Guides and students discuss the degree to which learning promises have been met and learning goals achieved, compliance is checked, consequences are implemented, and new learning goals decided. As illustrated in Figure 3b, the arrows indicate the self-management activities relevant from an ordonomic perspective that promote the individual learning process: (1) self-management of ego's incentives and their adaptation using rule reforms and (2) self-enlightenment about the possibility of implementing positive-sum games (with oneself) through rule reforms (win-win). Arrow (3) illustrates the guide's supportive – but non-interventionist – orientation that help implement the learning process of individual self-control and self-enlightenment.

Figure 4 illustrates the self-reinforcing process that can result from the reciprocal relationship between self-management and self-administration in the post-constitutional phase. Self-management of individual learning serves to establish an individual order of

¹⁰ From an ordonomic point of view, the establishment of discourse rules must be understood as a new situation. It gives rise to a new problem, the modelling of which requires a new three-level scheme: Level 1 is the basic game of town hall discussions, level 2 is the meta game of the current discourse rules, and level 3 is the discourse on the discourse rules and their reform.

¹¹ This question goes back to Steven Tomlinson and is noted in Sandefer (2017, p. 161).

learning. This process attempts to build competencies of self-enlightenment about realistic learning goals as well as competencies of self-control for individual self-commitments. Self-management of learning communities serves to establish a collective order of learning. This process develops competencies of self-enlightenment about the possibility of positive-sum games of collective learning and the self-control of collective self-commitments. Both processes are mutually reinforcing if supported by a suitable constitutional contract (student contract) and functional regulatory systems. A functional self-management of learning promotes a functioning individual learning process. It also provides incentives to discuss and promote the institutional implementation of collectively-beneficial learning rules. A functioning self-management process, on the other, helps emphasize the benefits of a thriving learning process for individual self-management as well, and also promotes the credibility of each individual's self-commitments to a productive learning journey.

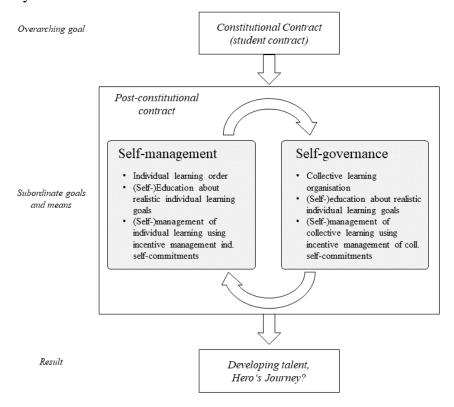


Figure 4: Self-management und self-administration in its constitutional context.

Source: Own representation

The ordonomic insight is this: The constitutional contract (student contract as constitution) formulates the collective consensus about an overarching, collective objective of the learning community. Here, the learning communities determines which attitudes toward learning to categorize as virtues and which as vices. At the post-constitutional level, based on a trial and error process, students formulate concrete subordinate goals for various tasks, experiment with rule arrangements as means of achieving these goals and make their consequences empirically tangible. The means-end arrangements of different areas of interest are then tested to see whether they are conducive to the overarching goal of practicing virtues that promote learning. This creates a self-directed system of incentives for action, which collectively enables the learning community to achieve its overarching

learning goals in the long term. Ideally, all learners develop the character virtues conducive to their individual hero's journey to develop a growth mindset.

Within the Acton method, peers and learning guides become agents that act on behalf of the learner and the student contract they have collectively agreed with everyone else. ¹² In the ideal case of a functionally interlocking, self-reinforcing process, they serve to develop individual character virtues such as personal responsibility, self-confidence (as trust in one's own promises), resilience, courage and impulse control (Stixrud and Johnson 2018). Ultimately, the Acton method with all its incentives contribute to the development of a 'growth mindset' – a goal the student contract clearly formulates: 'I will take care of my body, my brain, and my heart by giving them the things they need to be healthy and grow, such as exercise, information, challenges, and love. I will never give up on myself' (Sandefer (2018; p. 179).

3.4 Institutional management of individual virtues and vices

In conclusion, I will interpret the above results within the context of the relationship between individual and institutional ethics. I interpret both ethics roughly as follows: The goal of individual ethics is the formation of virtues that make pro-social behavior almost a second nature, so to speak. In economic terms, we would talk about changing preferences. The aim of institutional ethics is to create incentives that make pro-social behavior appear beneficial for the individual. In economic terms, we would talk about changing restrictions and, thus, incentives. How can Acton be understood from this perspective?

Fig. 5 helps provide an answer. The vertical dimension shows the incentives that groups establish to promote prosocial behavior (+) or prevent antisocial behavior (-). The horizontal dimension shows the feelings that intuitively support prosocial behavior (+) or inhibit antisocial behavior (-). The two cases of conflict represent deviations from consented goals. These are characterized as vices: In quadrant II, impulses and feelings promote antisocial behavior; in quadrant IV, there are tendencies to refrain from acting in favor of the group. Virtues are developed in the two harmony cases: In quadrant I, feelings support prosocial behavior; in quadrant III, there are tendencies to refrain from them.

How can Acton be positioned within this concept? First, it should be noted that Acton explicitly supports the individual and collective self-control of incentives to promote prosocial behaviors and discourage antisocial behaviors among learners. The self-commitments just discussed thus target the vertical dimension in Figure 5. For example, Acton clearly embeds incentives that encourage risk-taking behavior and making mistakes (+), while it inhibits status-seeking (-), both through the student contract and regularly reviewed rules. These incentives that stem from the rule framework are explicitly part of the institutional ethics of the Acton method. They support "institutional self-corrections", to use the terminology suggested by Pies (2024).

¹² In ordonomic terms, learning guides and peers provide a service for individual self-commitment of the learner towards him/herself, acting in accordance with the principles of the learning community accepted by the learner.

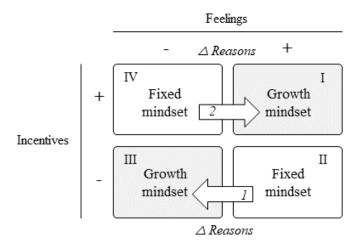


Figure 5: The self-corrective management informed by institutional ethics of individual virtues and vices (or mindsets). Source: Own representation based on Pies (2020; p. 16) and Hielscher (2022; p. 6)

Arrows 1 and 2 in Figure 5, on the other hand, illustrate the purpose of individual ethics within the Acton method. In this dimension, Acton supports the individual and collective self-education. Acton as a learning system, including guides, peers and supporting commitments, provides reasons why a growth mindset – and the 'virtues' located within it – helps the individual to learn and develop her talents, and why a fixed mindset – and the 'vices' included within it – is counterproductive for the same goal. It also explains why supportive feelings should be encouraged, and conflicting feelings discouraged, and how this can be achieved with the help of the learning community. A discourse culture, as just discussed, that promote the Hero's Journey falls into this category. They concern the "intentional self-corrections" (Pies 2024) to align individual feelings with the goals as enshrined in the student contract and the rule framework.

4. Conclusion: A syllogistic argument

Based on this reconstruction, let me conclude with a syllogistic argument that contains two classes of premises, a normative premise and three positive premises to arrive at a its conclusion.

- ((1)) The first premise formulates the normative goal: From an ordonomic perspective, the goal of a pedagogical concept is to support students in becoming competent private, economic and civic citizens.
 - ((2)) The second premise formulates three positive conditions:
- a) Competent private, economic and civic citizens possess the skills of self-control and self-enlightenment ('virtues') in both individual self-management and collective self-governance.¹³

¹³ Specifically, control competencies relate to the ability to recognize the relevance of incentives for action and their reform through regulatory reforms, both individually (time inconsistency problems) and collectively (collective incentive problems). Enlightenment competencies concern the ability to recognize the

- b) There are pedagogical concepts that successfully promote the development of self-management and self-governance skills ('virtues'), in part because they delegate the teaching of learning content to digital learning platforms (Khan Academy, Lexia, etc.). This allows a stronger focus on the training of virtues, as the example of the Acton Academy shows.
- c) In such pedagogical concepts, guides and peers (with the support of parents) lead students to iterative, individual and institutional self-corrections within the framework of experiential learning.
- ((3)) This leads to the following conclusion: To realize an meaningful pedagogical concept for the training of competent private, economic and civic citizens, no specific educational content is needed. Rather, self-enlightenment and self-control competencies in self-management and self-administration must be developed with the help of suitable intentional and institutional self-corrections.

From this conclusion follows that intentional and institutional self-corrections do not have to contradict each other. They can go hand in hand. If one follows the line that individual ethics is essentially aimed at self-management and corresponding intentional - although informal by institutional ethics (sic!) - self-corrections, while institutional ethics promotes the practice of collective self-governance and corresponding forms of institutional self-correction, then this thesis can be formulated: Self-management competencies – supported by their practice and, if necessary, their intentional self-correction in the school context – can be an important prerequisite for enabling (prospective) citizens to implement forms of institutional self-correction. In other words: Individual virtues of selfmanagement – growth mindset, fault tolerance and personal responsibility – facilitate understanding self-enlightenment and self-control as a collective, institutional task of consent-based self-governance, first at school and eventually in society. Such an individual mindset also appears to be highly suitable for promoting the institutional (self-)management of competitive functional systems in modern society, as well as for tackling the increasing contingency of social challenges as well as counteracting the widespread polarization of social discourse (Douse and Uys 2020).

I conclude with a thesis and a final reflection.

The thesis is that competencies in self-management and self-governance can be taught in schools, provided that the pedagogical concept is precisely geared towards this task. Of course, this requires institutional conditions for learners that allow them to develop their abilities in all areas of competency. If my assessment of the empirical literature should be correct, this precondition does not appear to exist across the board in German-speaking countries, even if some independent schools practicing reform pedagogy provide some glimmer of hope.¹⁴

The final reflection concerns the internal perspective of ordonomics. It seems to me that the intentional self-corrections that rely on individual ethics have so far received less attention in the study of ordonomics, with a few exceptions (Pies and Hielscher, 2013; Pies 2020; Pies 2017, Hielscher 2022). My conjecture is that the mental competencies in

possibility of implementing positive-sum games through rule reforms (win-win), both individually and collectively. Individual self-enlightenment refers to the ability to recognize the relevance and practice of virtues that promote learning, such as fault tolerance and resilience. Collective self-enlightenment refers to the ability to recognize that positive-sum games will be possible if other learners are also enabled to develop the same virtues.

¹⁴ These include the educational reform ideas of Maria Montessori and the Democratic School, to name just two of many more concepts. See https://eudec.org.

question are taken for granted. In view of the empirical evidence, however, this assumption does not (or no longer) seem to be given. Intentional self-corrections, and their institutional pre-requisites, therefore require special and separate attention, especially in schools.

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