



"Ground may be classified according to its nature as accessible, entangling, temporizing, narrow, precipitous, or distant. The general who thoroughly understands the advantages that accompany variation of tactics knows how to handle his troops."

— The Art of War, Chapter 10

PRINCIPLE

Choose terrain that forces human skill practice

Sun Tzu evaluated ground before deploying troops. You must evaluate learning environments before committing your child. Not all activities develop the capacities that matter. Most optimize for measurement, not for the messy human skills AI cannot replicate.

REMEMBER

71% of teachers teach to tests, not capacities

A 2024 McKinsey study found that **71 percent of K-12 teachers report pressure to teach to standardized assessments**, leaving minimal room for open-ended projects or student-driven inquiry. If school is the only terrain your child occupies, they are not getting enough practice being human.

THIS WEEK

Three moves to run now

- List every structured activity your child participates in. For each one, answer the four evaluation questions: Does it require navigating ambiguity? Does it force collaboration with different thinkers? Does it allow meaningful failure? Does it value process or just outcome?
- Identify one accessible terrain opportunity—low-stakes, exploratory, forgiving of mistakes—and add it to your child's schedule. Community service project, neighborhood skill-share, informal sports pickup game. The goal is not another credential. The goal is practice with intrinsic motivation.
- If your child is currently in entangling terrain that is not serving them—competitive team, specialized track, year-round commitment—name it out loud and create an exit plan. Sunk cost is not strategy. Changing terrain when the current environment stops developing your child is not quitting. It is adaptation.

CORE INSIGHT

Parents obsess over credentials and test scores while ignoring the ground beneath their feet. Most learning environments optimize for measurement, not for the messy human skills—negotiation, resilience, creative problem-solving—that AI cannot replicate. Choose terrain that forces your child to practice being human, not just performing tasks.