WHY THESE PROJECTS WORKED

Sustainable land use in Bulgaria, fresh fruits and vegetables for low-income neighborhoods in the District of Columbia, a polluted lake in Brazil and a polluted river in Vermont, a new wildlife refuge in Colorado . . . maps drawn by hand, data collected from GPS satellites, surveys of community members, historical research . . . what do these projects and methods have in common? What makes them viable, both as means of learning (in or out of a classroom) and as effective agents of change in the real world?

There are, of course, many reasons why these projects succeeded—not the least of which is that young people committed to the welfare of their communities worked hard, and brought considerable "natural" resources of intelligence and determination to bear on the problems at hand. A less obvious, but just as important element, has to do with methodology, or the way the project's progress is planned and carried out.

Effective action depends on good planning, which in turn depends on a working understanding of methodology (among other things). Look over the projects again, and notice especially those places where project developers adhered to the structure of the stages of problem solving as diagrammed above: for instance, in the Shaw EcoVillage TEAM-UP process; the carefully elaborated "Goals and Objectives" of the Clean Water Club in Bulgaria; the Blue Lake Action Plan; the presentations of findings by the Colorado wildlife area student policy-makers to schoolmates, concerned citizens, and governmental authorities; and the use of the Internet as a research tool in Vermont.

Spatial reasoning, used with some basic knowledge and a willingness to learn, a desire to serve one's neighbors (and their neighbors, and their neighbors beyond them, on around the world) and a determination to "find a way"—these are the keys to sustainable development and a successful project.

STAGES OF PROBLEM SOLVING

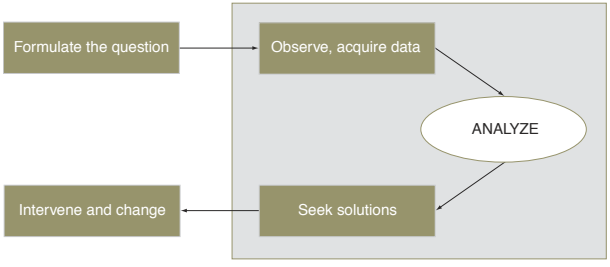

Diagram courtesy Michael Goodchild, UCSB