Preparing for an Interview

At this stage of the inquiry, even though students had begun lining up experts to help them, we had not yet done a whole class lesson on planning and conducting an interview. This conversation with Daniel reminded us to put that lesson on our agenda for the next day.

SMOKEY: Hey, Daniel. We did find a physicist from Los Alamos who’s going to come for you and Devin to interview.

DANIEL: Really?

SMOKEY: Yeah.

DANIEL: Cool! When is he coming?

SMOKEY: Next Tuesday. His name is Dr. Eisenstein. We’re still working on the exact time. Since you guys have gotten everyone interested in this topic, I thought you two could interview him in front of the whole class, and after you’ve gotten your inquiry questions answered, then the other kids could talk to him also.

DANIEL: Cool. I’ve been working on my interview questions. Can you take a look? (He hands over list of 10 questions about nuclear weapons.)

SMOKEY (Reading): Great, lots of good ones here. (Reading) “What are the effects of an atom bomb?”—that’s a complicated one.

DANIEL: Yeah it’s kinda like dropping a big rock on a bunch of ants.

SMOKEY: Really? How do you mean?

DANIEL: Well, it’s like you kill so many of them at once.

SMOKEY: Hmm. Does an atom bomb act like a rock when it is dropped?

DANIEL: No, no—there’s much more that happens, it reaches out much farther.

SMOKEY: What do you mean?
DANIEL: . . . Well there's flash of light . . .

SMOKEY: Uh-huh. . .

DANIEL: . . . and radiation, and heat and the shock wave . . .

SMOKEY: Is that the order things happen?

DANIEL: Uh, I think so. Maybe. I better look at my articles again.

SMOKEY: Remember that David Bodanis book I gave you called E=MC2?

DANIEL: Yeah.

SMOKEY: In Chapter 9, I think it is, the author gives you a step-by-step account—sometimes it’s millisecond by millisecond—of what happens in a nuclear explosion. Remember that thing with the trip wires on the plane? So you can get the sequence there.

DANIEL: OK, thanks.

SMOKEY (Still reading questions): I notice that you are kind of going from factual questions to bigger, more open-ended ones toward the end.

DANIEL: We tried to do that. Like we talked about in class—big, fat, juicy questions.

SMOKEY: Yeah, I heard you talk about some questions in the group that aren’t on the list. Like whether using atom bombs is OK or not. You were talking about the morality. . .

DANIEL: Right, I don’t know why I forgot that stuff.

SMOKEY: Well, there is so much to think about. Why don’t you go ahead and add some of those big questions to the list?