Lesson Plan for Chapter 1

*Instant: The Story of Polaroid* by Christopher Bonanos
First Year Book 2014-15

Prior to Class:

Have students read Chapter 1 of Instant in preparation for this class activity and discussion. The chapter guide online (fyb.umd.edu) will also help them prepare for the class.

Chapter 1: Light and Vision

‘Light and Vision’ begins by discussing the legacy of Polaroid today, the nostalgia that surrounds it, and the similarities between two of the greatest innovators of our day: Edwin Land and Steve Jobs. The similarities between the two men were remarkable: both dropped out of college, both started companies in their garage or small Boston apartment, and each of those companies went on to become one of the greatest and most influential of an era. Both men also had similar visions of a product that was as beautiful as it was functional and worked tirelessly to make those products a reality.

One of the key points of the book is that the innovators and innovations of today aren’t our first, and they won’t be our last. Polaroid was one of the most innovative and groundbreaking companies of its time, with a technology that everyone wanted; however, it eventually declined and was replaced by something that no one, at the beginning of instant film or even decades later, thought was even possible: digital photography. It may seem like Apple, Facebook, or Google will be around forever, but that isn’t the case – they too will eventually be replaced by new companies and technologies.

Class Activity: Student Predictions

Many people now look back on Polaroid with nostalgia. What do you think you’ll be nostalgic for in the future? Make a prediction about something you think will become obsolete in your lifetime, and try to think about what might come along to replace it.

Have each student write down detailed answers to the following:

1. What is it (technology, company, idea) that will become obsolete?
2. What do you think will replace it?
3. Why? What need does it fulfill? Does it need to fix a problem or, like Polaroid pictures, produce a new way of doing something that’s been done before?
4. Is it something you will be nostalgic for? Why or why not?
Have each student, or volunteers, make their predictions individually. Then, put them in pairs or small groups to talk them through and get feedback from others. After a few minutes of this, have them write down whether or not their predictions have changed after getting feedback, and why or why not.

Discussion

Then, as a class, discuss the following:

1. What were your original predictions? Share these with the class.
2. Are there any different predictions about the same thing? Why?
3. How does your personal experience inform your prediction?
4. Did talking with others change the prediction you made? What types of insights informed your prediction after talking it over with your group?
5. All of us are innovators. What skills are important for predicting the next big thing?
6. How does this exercise help you in preparing for graduation in four years? What skills do you want to gain during your time here at UMD? What types of jobs will be necessary for the ‘next big thing,’ and how does predicting that help you to plan your future?