

life-saving drugs. She detailed the decision-making process and the pain that accompanied both the decision and the eventual death of her father. She revealed the initial questions they considered—would it be what he wanted, would the neighbors and other relatives understand, would we be able to do it—and she detailed the lingering questions—did we do the right thing? The student offered an honest portrait of her family's situation by detailing the research they did and the tears they shared. The result was that her classmates were driven to ask more questions and eventually to understand that textbook and media discussions on the subject often miss the important human dimensions of care, agony, uncertainty, and hope that are woven into the fabric of the subject. The dialogue in the room that day transformed how many understood the controversial practice of euthanasia.

Classroom discussion in no way guarantees dialogue, however. Have you ever been in a situation when someone started talking about abortion, for instance, and soon the talking turned into heated conversation and then forceful argument? The speaker likely never even considered that there might be people in the room who had an abortion, or counseled someone not to have one, or had been close to someone who had to make a decision about keeping or terminating a pregnancy.

What typically follows when the topic of abortion becomes a depersonalized yet heated monologue is that many of the other students simply tune out what the speaker is saying. Or, if someone does respond, and the reply comes out just as forcefully as the first speaker's words, the interaction quickly becomes a competition to "win" the argument or at least to have the last say. This sets up a negative spiral of communication that disregards the possibility of deep understanding or the transformation of our views or even taking some time to think. Rather, people get locked into their positions as they experience agitation toward the others who hold different views. This kind of *polarized communication* is best recognized as the "I am right, you are wrong" form of talk.

DON'T POLARIZE—CONNECT!

The corrective to polarized communication is to encourage dialogue, often with the first move involving a question or a proposition that is open-ended. For example, someone who wanted to honestly confront the complexities of abortion might offer this opening to the conversation. "I have never known anyone who had an abortion and I know that those on both sides of the issue hold strong views. I, myself, am against it because I love children so