Research shows that diversity makes us smarter. Designing an inclusive classroom that allows students to share differing opinions in a brave space where people are treated with dignity can result in good learning outcomes for all. Conflict is a natural part of learning, and differences of opinion expressed in appropriate ways allow everyone to grow. An inclusive classroom allows the instructor to manage conflict in a way that harnesses differences so that they serve as learning opportunities for all.

Here are some key elements to consider when designing an inclusive classroom.

1. **Dialogue:** Introduce concepts of dialogue and share with students that you are inviting them into a space where dialogue (as opposed to debate) is encouraged. Challenging students to listen actively, share constructively and think critically is often more productive than searching for one right answer. Using dialogic methodology balances power in the room, seeks to increase understanding across difference and adds to the common pool of knowledge. (See “Dialogue” handout #5)

2. **Listening:** Explicitly teaching students how to practice active listening techniques can have lifelong benefits. Rather than listening just long enough to respond, encourage students to listen generously and lead with curiosity. Asking good questions will result in far more learning than our cultural habit of frequent self-involved interjections.

3. **Learning Edges:** Share with students that real learning is often messy and we learn when we make mistakes and experience discomfort. Invite them to bravely view discomfort as opportunities to extend their knowledge.

4. **Hot Buttons:** Helping students understand what may press their buttons and elicit discomfort and inviting to pre-think ways to respond constructively in those moments of discomfort in the classroom can help individuals and a class collectively respect one another and move toward dialogue.

5. **Group Norms:** Developing classroom guidelines collectively and referring to them frequently can help students remember the rules that they collaboratively agreed upon when things get tense. Be sure to include, “Don’t freeze people in time,” which gives participants the opportunity to take risks (which is what learning is about), make mistakes and not be “frozen” there in perpetuity. Ensuring that students “expect/accept discomfort” also normalizes the experience and reminds them that it is through challenge that we learn and grow.

6. **Community:** Spending time in the classroom with ice-breakers and assignments (like a testimonial assignment) help students get to know one another and view one another as worthy of being treated with respect during discussions on topics that challenge ways of knowing, values, beliefs, and perspectives.