Ben was teaching Geography in a large comprehensive school. In Year 10, he had a mixed ability group. Although he was committed to the philosophy underpinning mixed ability teaching, he felt that he was not doing a very good job: it was tempting to teach to the middle and hope for the best! He decided that he needed to do something about the situation and work towards establishing a more inclusive classroom in which the high-achievers were appropriately challenged and the low-achievers were supported.

He went back to his notes from his PGCE and a training course he attended in his NQT year and identified some approaches to differentiation that he would like to try.

He summarised his aim in one question: 'How can I become a more effective teacher of a mixed ability group?'

He identified three specific interventions, which could each be carried out during one or two lessons. He gave himself a week between each intervention to analyse the results and used the results to modify his design of the next intervention.

His friend who taught History was interested in what he was doing and agreed to video the first lesson for him. This was fairly helpful, but he decided that he preferred to watch particular pupils more closely, so in subsequent intervention lessons he used an MP3 player to record selected pupils as they worked. He also kept his own observation notes, he analysed the work that the students produced as a result of the intervention lessons.

He designed a questionnaire for the class about how they felt about geography, which he administered twice, at the start of the topic and at the end of his project. He also put together three focus groups (high, low and medium attainers) and asked them about the lessons, and their learning.

He discovered that pupils enjoyed being given a choice about the tasks that they did. He realised that group work could be much more effective if he decided who should be in what groups, rather than just letting them choose.

He also began to really understand the importance of not just basing his assessments on written work. By giving more opportunity for presentations and oral contributions, he was able to organise success for some of the previous ‘low attainers’ with the result that their confidence and attitude improved.