

The Faculty of Creative Arts, Roby Comprehensive School

Few teachers of practical subjects would disagree that the acquisition of practical skills by the pupil is an objective to which all of us should work. However, many teachers would suggest that, valuable as these skills are, their acquisition should form only a part of what we are doing. The constitution of the other part of the course is open to much discussion.

It would seem to me that we must involve the pupil in some form of thinking process and that this component of the course is of equal importance to the skills we can teach him, both are required in later life. It would now appear that the previously skill-orientated course might be of lesser importance in an economic climate of unemployment and job retraining. What might be required is a course that is wide rather than specific and encourages adaptability rather than rigidity. A flexible mind as well as skilful hands.

I joined the staff at Roby Comprehensive School in September, 1973. The school had been comprehensive for one academic year and had an excessively large fifth year, the first of the R.O.S.L.A. pupils. The school was organised on a four faculty basis and I was responsible for Art, Metal, Wood, Fabrics, D.S., T.D., P.E. and Music. Not, at first glance, a very closely knit group of subjects, but it has never been the policy of the headmaster to insist upon the integration of either the whole or for that matter a part of any faculty.

As would happen in any new Comprehensive school, and certainly one changing in character from a Secondary Modern, the influx of academically brighter pupils in the Lower School, presupposed a close examination of already established courses. Were the courses suitable for such a divergence of academic ability? Did they give the opportunity to all pupils to follow a practical subject through to external examination standard? Was it possible for new members of staff to pick up the reins of those staff who leave? Did they give the experience necessary to make meaningful option choices later in their school career? Did the courses provide for educational continuity regardless of who teaches the subject? Were they internally assessable? These were all questions that were asked early in 1974 and it became increasingly obvious that a change of emphasis was needed. What had been satisfactory in a Secondary Modern was not so in a Comprehensive, and this was particularly noticeable in Art and the Practical subjects and it is within these confines that I shall restrict this document.

We felt that we had much to offer both the school and the pupils if we could formulate a teaching strategy that exploited our strengths as a team rather than highlighted our individual weaknesses. In the Spring of 1974 we met with the specific purpose of replanning ready for the September Comprehensive intake, and my task was made easier in a way because of the general feeling of mild, and in some cases, extreme, dissatisfaction with the way things were operative at that time. Of the eleven staff who were present at the original meeting six of us still remain; and of the five replacements two

of those are still with us. Much of the good work that has been produced is due in no small way to the stability of the staffing situation. We are a young team and I have been lucky enough to have a headmaster who has realised the advantages of promoting the promising young teachers within the school so that after their initial settling-in period they become an asset to our school instead of someone else's.

The decisions made at that early meeting, sometimes by intuition rather than practical experience (there were few people who had the experience from which we could have benefitted) were far reaching in their consequences. In no particular order, we decided:

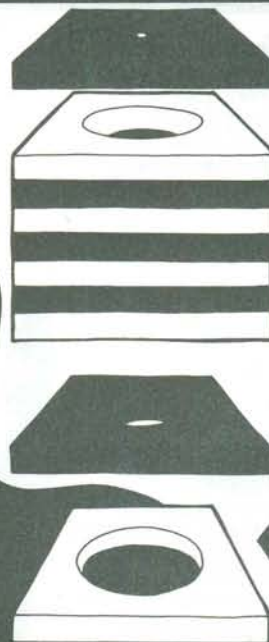
- (A) We wished to encourage pupils to think in a logical sequence as well as acquire practical skills.
- (B) We wished pupils to respond to visual stimuli, and to be able to develop an idea away from its original source.
- (C) We wished to extend the academically gifted as well as catering for the less-able.
- (D) We wished to remove the element of competition and establish the practice of individual project work.
- (E) We wished to give a wide experience of differing disciplines.
- (F) We wished to establish a syllabus and to publish a document that could be used by a new teacher to the team ensuring continuity of the material of his predecessor so that the thread of the pupils' education remains unbroken.
- (G) We wished to have a core of syllabus content common to all disciplines.
- (H) We wished the syllabus to be a framework leaving the specific material to be organised by the subject teacher within the agreed defined limits set by the team.
- (I) We hoped to be able to persuade the headmaster to allow every pupil to have the opportunity to study a practical subject to external examination level, a situation that did not prevail within the option pattern operating in 1973.

b COLOUR

Problem: make a salt pot

1 Your teacher will give you ten 50mm squares of acrylic. Five of these will be one colour; five will be another colour. Identify the colour relationship between the colours. Are they harmonies or discords? If you are unsure Information Card 4 will help you.

2 Seven of the squares have already been laminated together for you. Arrange your squares in the colour sequence shown in the diagram. You are to drill holes in them and it is important that you drill the right hole through the right coloured piece.



3 Mark diagonal lines across this square. Drill a 2mm hole through the centre. Technique Card 6 shows you how to drill.

4 Mark diagonal lines across the top square of the laminate to find the centre. Then ask your teacher to help you drill a 25mm hole through the seven piece laminate.

5 Mark diagonal lines across this square, and drill a 12mm hole through the centre.

6 Mark diagonal lines across this square, and drill a 25mm hole through the centre.

Having decided that this was what we required from a syllabus and a teaching method, we then discussed many ways that all our aims could be achieved. One of the most important decisions we made in the early days was on the question of external examinations. Did we dovetail our Lower School programme into the existing examination framework or did we formulate our own C.S.E. and G.C.E. Mode 3's. We tended to favour the former and when we contacted the G.C.E. Boards concerning the submission of a Mode 3 broad-based Design/ Problem Solving Examination and encountered a very lukewarm response, the decision was made for us. I am pleased that our decision has been vindicated to the extent that the Design-based G.C.E. examinations have mushroomed in the intervening years, and that the C.S.E. Boards are scrutinising many of their existing Mode 3 courses with an eye to methods of assessment and economic viability. Having taken this decision it did in a number of ways determine how far out on the educational limb we could venture.

First Year Course

Having decided to teach in a mixed ability situation, we organised our six form entry first year intake into small groups of six or seven by I.Q., so that each group contained a complete spread of the I.Q. range. Number one in the group was the most academically gifted, whilst number seven in the group was considerably less academically inclined.

We then decided to rotate the groups through three twelve-week units, using the three themes Surface, Colour and Space as linking factors. We have never stipulated that the themes are to be used as a means of integration but more as a way of introducing the syllabus common core.

In the first unit we covered the design concepts of Dot and Linear Two-Dimensional Surface Arrangements as well as Area Division. This was presented in two ways, one where the child has a problem in the form of a card or design brief, and the other is a more creative activity where the child uses the design material to develop a visual stimulus

in his own way. The design brief/problem cards are organised in groups of seven matched to the I.Q. range of the sub-groups in the year i.e. Number One in the group receives design brief number one, the most difficult, whilst number seven in the group receives the easiest. We try to match our briefs very closely to the child's ability and his performance is monitored on his record card and could affect his position in the group for the subsequent unit. All the work in this unit is completed in the neutrals, Black, White and Grey.

In the second unit the pupils rotate through the creative activities of Painting/Drawing and Printmaking and the problem solving activities of 3D work, Home Economics and Cookery. Constructions and fabrics are in some units creative whilst in others problem solving. The time spent in any activity can be varied depending upon the contribution which that activity can give to the common core and to the theme. At the beginning of each unit is a short introductory session in which the theme is introduced in the form of an illustrated slide talk and where the practical skills most commonly required by the design briefs are formally demonstrated. In order to remind pupils of these and of the information contained in the slide talk, technique and information cards are referred to on the brief and the pupil is able to use these for reference.

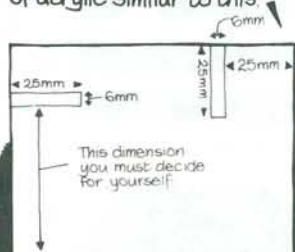
It is obviously crucial to the system that the design briefs are accurate in terms of the I.Q. range for which they are intended. Many briefs have been discarded and amended and we have now selected the most reliable out of the hundreds that have been produced. A selection of these used in the 3D design section, and in particular those associated with the use of acrylic, have been published by Heinemann Educational Books together with their accompanying technique and Information Cards.

Having reliable design briefs means that the assessment of pupils' performance can be made with greater confidence and it is the responsibility of one member of staff to scrutinise the record cards, which are filled in at the conclusion of every activity, for pupils who are performing considerably better than

d SPACE

Problem: make a sculpture

1 Read Technique Card 1 and Information Card 2. Remembering about positioning lines in rectangles, mark out the 75mm x 160mm piece of acrylic similar to this.



2 Mark out two more slots on the 75mm square piece of acrylic, using 25mm and 6mm as the dimensions. Again, the distance from either end you must decide for yourself.

3 Mark out just one slot on the remaining two pieces of acrylic, using 25mm and 6mm as the dimensions. The distance from the end you must decide for yourself.

4 Read Technique Cards 4 and 5. Then file smooth, rub with emery cloth, and polish all four edges of the four pieces on the Buffing Wheel.

5 Drill 6mm holes in each piece of acrylic in the position shown here.



6 Read Technique Card 2. Then use a hacksaw to saw down your two marked lines so that you can remove the shaded piece.



7 In the same way saw out all the marked sections on each of your pieces of acrylic.



their position in the sub-group would indicate or pupils who are experiencing great difficulty. Readjustment can be made within the group without the pupil being aware of it.

The design briefs themselves are fairly detailed and in no way open-ended. The pupil is directed from stage to stage to the final completed piece of work. There is, however, in the brief a small design decision that he alone must make using the information contained in the slide talk and the information cards to solve it. This is recognised as his problem by the teacher and very little assistance is given directly. If help is given, it is suggesting avenues of new thought or encouraging the development of already existing ideas. Pupils are encouraged to think logically and to commit their thoughts to paper in every activity. It is this method of working and not the themes that is our one integrating factor.

Second Year Course

As in the First Year, the Second Year pupils are organised into groups of seven, but the position of the group members is determined by their first year performance, as recorded on their record cards. Usually there are twenty seven groups, further divided into three teams of nine, i.e. A1 to A9, B1 to B9, and C1 to C9. Again, the groups are rotated. This time in the first twelve week unit the A groups will rotate through three activities organised by the Art Department, Painting/Drawing, Printmaking and Three Dimensional work. The B groups would rotate through Metal/Plastics, Woodwork and Technical Drawing used as a service to the two former activities. The C groups would rotate through Home Economics, Needlework and Cookery. At the end of each twelve weeks the teams change areas, so what is accomplished is a rotation similar to the First Year but taking thirty six weeks to complete rather than twelve. There are no introductory themes used, but, again, great emphasis is placed upon the method of working. Design Briefs and problem cards are again used and these differ from the first year ones in so much

as they are more open-ended and less directive, and also because of the longer time involved, more complicated, calling for a greater design and preparation contribution from the pupil. A rather different situation prevails in the art areas where a 'starter situation' is used as the basis for work. This usually takes the form of some sort of visual stimulus from which the pupil is encouraged to develop his ideas in each of the three activities. This is similar to the creative activities employed during the pupil's first year.

When the nine activities are completed at the end of the year, each pupil has the opportunity to look at his record card and takes home a departmental option form from which he chooses three activities to study in greater depth in the Third Year. These option forms are scrutinised very carefully comparing the choices against the strengths revealed on the pupil's record cards.

Third Year Course

Each pupil must choose three activities from those taken in the Second Year, i.e. Metalwork, Woodwork, Technical Drawing, Domestic Science, Needlework or Art. The year is divided up into three twelve week units, one unit for each activity. Each pupil will have three seventy minute periods per week.

The activities are organised very much as a diagnostic situation prior to the external examination courses starting in the Fourth Year and, as such are very much a simpler and more easily understood version of those syllabi. Pupils are therefore made very aware of what is required by an examination should they later choose that area of study. It also gives the teacher the opportunity to assess a pupil's examination potential with a reasonable degree of accuracy.

The individual design briefs are abandoned in favour of a project booklet, which to all intents and purposes is an illustrated examination question paper, giving pupils first of all the opportunity to choose a project and, secondly, the possible sources of reference and inspiration needed to solve any project. Pupils are usually required to answer two differing

9

SURFACE

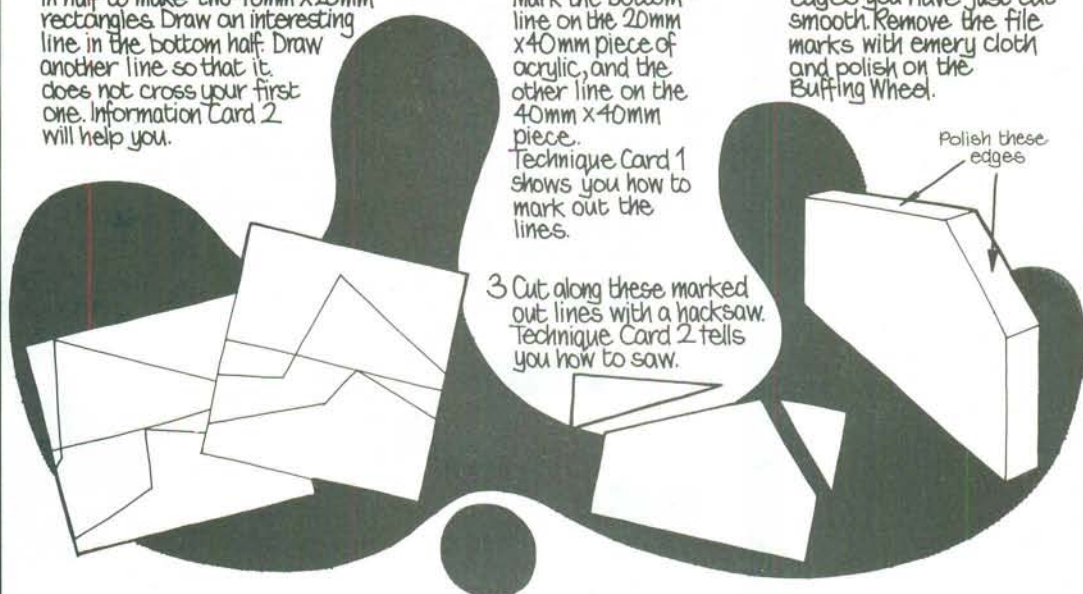
Problem: make a pendant

1 Draw a series of rectangles 40mm x 40mm. Divide them in half to make two 40mm x 20mm rectangles. Draw an interesting line in the bottom half. Draw another line so that it does not cross your first one. Information Card 2 will help you.

2 Select your most successful design. Mark the bottom line on the 20mm x 40mm piece of acrylic, and the other line on the 40mm x 40mm piece. Technique Card 1 shows you how to mark out the lines.

3 Cut along these marked out lines with a hacksaw. Technique Card 2 tells you how to saw.

4 Read Technique Cards 4 and 5. Then file the edges you have just cut smooth. Remove the file marks with emery cloth and polish on the Buffing Wheel.



projects in the twelve week course submitting for assessment the finished projects and all the design work and preparation. Assessment is critical as any marks less than C- would mean that that pupil was not external examination potential and would not be able to take that activity in the fourth year. It must be borne in mind that C- would be a possible Grade 5 C.S.E. two years later. In practice, only the lazy, disruptive or the pupils with erratic attendance records fall into the D category at this early juncture.

The record card system continues, particular reference being made to the pupil's examination potential, and this card is made available as a discussion document at the Third Year Parents' Evening, held before any examination options are chosen.

Fourth and Fifth Year Courses

It is during the Fourth and Fifth years that I feel we gain considerable flexibility by being able to operate a block timetable. We are also fortunate that the Headmaster instituted a change in option policy. This has meant that, as far as our faculty is concerned, all pupils must study one subject in our faculty and that no pupil may study more than two.

All subjects are offered to G.C.E. and C.S.E. level, but it is imperative that the two syllabi are compatible, that is capable of being taught to a mixed C.S.E. and G.C.E. group. In order to guarantee a blanket option so that each pupil takes an Art/Practical Subject it does mean that the academic pupils in the G.C.E. groups are distributed over seven subjects. In reality, this would mean, approximately, nine to a subject given our sixth-form entry. Obviously, a viable G.C.E. group could not be guaranteed. The remainder of the average group of eighteen would be made up of C.S.E. pupils.

We offer the Associated Examining Board's Ordinary level, Art and Design, Craftwork 'Wood', Craftwork 'Metal', Geometric and Engineering Drawing, Nutrition and Cookery and Dress Design. In the North West Secondary School Examining Boards, Certificate of Secondary Education we offer

Art and Design, Woodwork, Metalwork, Technical Drawing, Domestic Science and Needlework.

All these courses are taught in the traditional manner, and they are chosen for their bias towards designwork and preparation.

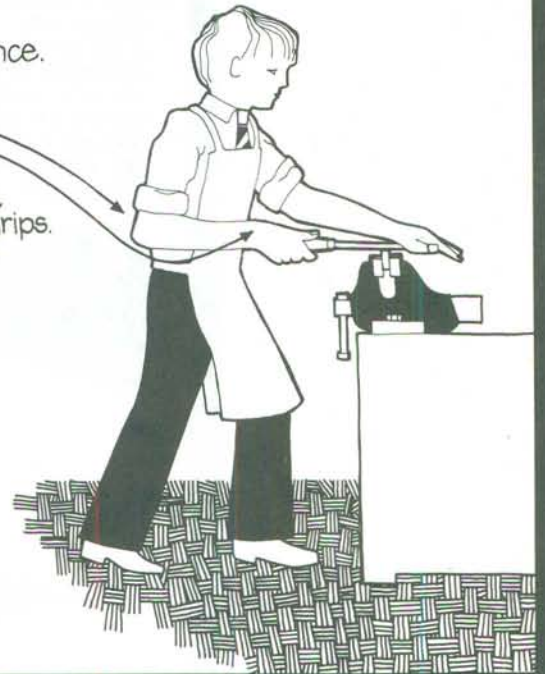
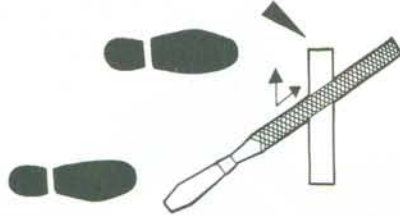
The flexibility we gain by being block timetabled is that we can, without disturbing the remainder of the school, quickly move a pupil who, at the beginning of the course, finds the work too difficult or for other reasons feels he has made a wrong choice. These changes, however, are becoming less frequent, due to the reliance placed upon the report card as an aid to option choices. It is also important in the operation of our General Course. This is a course that caters for those pupils who are still taking an Art/Practical subject but who were assessed at a grade lower than C- at the end of the third year in more than one of their three activities. As a generalisation on each of the two options there are about eighteen pupils who occupy places on the General Course, these are divided up into six groups of three, one girl, one boy and a pupil with a poor attendance record. These six groups are then divided amongst the seven subjects organised on a very simple course of about half a term in duration. At the end of this period the groups are then rotated. Any pupil who produces acceptable work in any subject may remain in the C.S.E. group and if this improvement is maintained can still be entered for the examination. Conversely, any pupil in an examination group can be placed on the General Course if his work or behaviour gives cause for concern.

The purpose of the General Course is more administrative rather than educational. It, firstly, divides the group of potentially disruptive pupils into small controllable groups, secondly, it encourages a pupil to find an activity that is of some interest to him before he moves to an activity he might not find to his liking. The onus is then on the pupil to prove himself. In practice, the General Course shrinks to half its number by the end of the Fourth Year, as the pupils find it easier to work in a C.S.E.

Technique card 4: Filing acrylic plastic

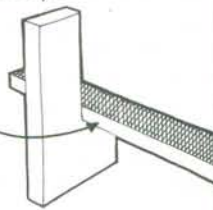
HOW TO CROSS FILE

- * 1 Spread your legs to give you balance.
- * 2 Keep your arm and the file in a straight line.
- * 3 Keep the wrist joint firm.
- * 4 Use the full length of the file.
- * 5 The vice jaws will mark the surface of your acrylic, so always use vice grips.
- * 6 Position the work as low as possible in the jaws of the vice to prevent the material snapping.
- * 7 File across and along at the same time.



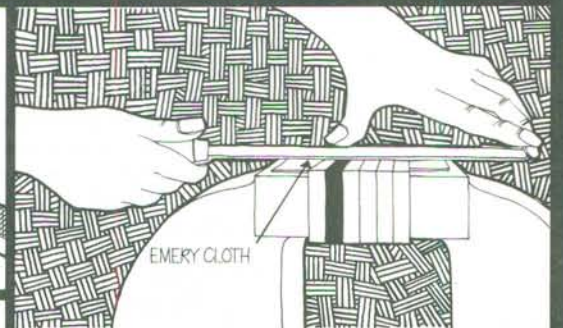
USING THE SAFE EDGE

This uncut safe edge will not damage the face it is touching.



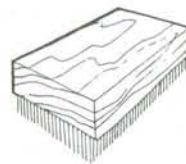
TYPES OF FILE

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| □ | | General use, one edge uncut |
| D | | General use, and for concave curves |
| △ | | Awkward corners less than 90° |
| ○ | | Small concave curves, easing out holes |
| □ | | Slotting, grooving and square edges |



You may use emery cloth along the blade of the file to remove file marks prior to polishing. Technique Card 5 tells you how to prepare acrylic for polishing.

USING THE FILE CARD



If the file is not cleaned it will clog and badly scratch the work. You can clean the file by brushing the file card along the direction of the teeth.

activity rather than be constantly moved from subject to subject doing the most simple of work.

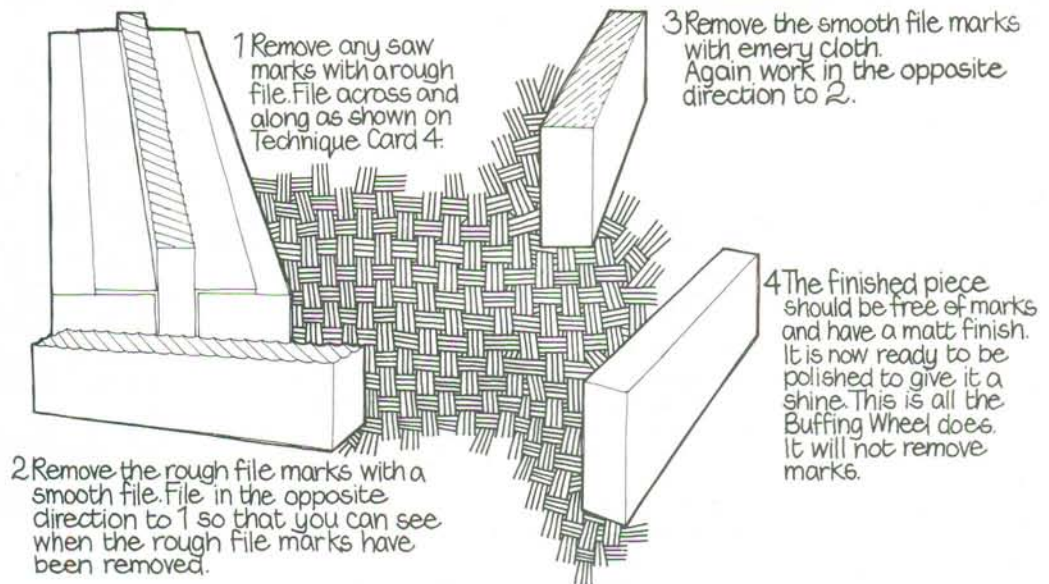
Our first year's intake have taken external examinations this summer and, once again, it will be time to evaluate. Rather than look for any improvement I will be very pleased if our results remain the same as they have been in previous years. I feel that if we can maintain the results at the top of the school and still divert time from the practical

skills to the training of practical and logical thinkers in the Lower School, then we shall have gained a great deal. If there is an improvement, and then it would be difficult to accredit this just to our change of direction, I would be very pleased.

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking the many members of staff in my department both past and present for the many hours of preparation, completed in their own time, to enable our present

Technique card 5: Polishing acrylic plastic

PREPARING ACRYLIC FOR THE BUFFING WHEEL



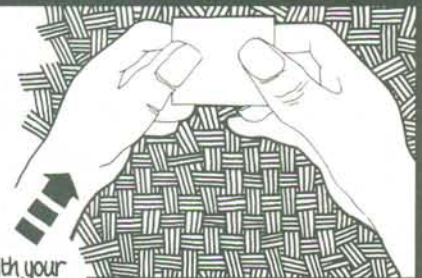
USING THE BUFFING WHEEL

BEFORE YOU START

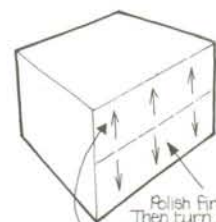
- * Tie your hair back out of the way
- * Tuck your tie inside your shirt
- * Tie your apron at the back
- * Wear a pair of goggles
- * Roll up your sleeves, or fasten them at the wrist.



- 1 Hold the work firmly with your fingers as close to the face to be polished as possible, but without actually touching the wheel with your fingers. Use both hands.
- 2 Rest your forearms on your waist and stand close to the machine.
- 3 Stand with your feet apart, one foot slightly in front of the other.
- 4 Hold your work below the centre of the Buffing Wheel.
- 5 Keep the acrylic moving on the wheel to avoid burning it.
- 6 Apply a small amount of polishing compound at regular intervals.



POLISHING A BLOCK



Polish the bottom half first, then turn the block upside down and polish the other half. If the wheel catches the top edge it will pull your work out of your hands.

scheme to become operational. Many design briefs, information and technique cards and project books have been produced and it is very stimulating to be involved in a team constantly producing new ideas. Also, to John Orton, now at Kingsthorpe Upper School in Northampton under whom I worked before coming to Roby and whose leadership, in my early teaching career, I found of immense value, and finally to my Headmaster

and Deputy, who have never refused me a request (in all the years of timetable manipulation) for readjustment of option patterns and whose advice and assistance have always been so available.