My work aims to document the experiences of art teachers at schools and to demonstrate the ways and purposes, the hows and the whys of teaching art, in particular how ideas are developed for lessons of art.

The teachers selected for the interviews perceive the process of teaching art in relation to the process of creation of art. They have a personal interest in art processes, they generate ideas for lessons independently from the time of the day and the location, they have a difficulty in a detailed planning of the study process for a longer period of time; the subjects of lessons are connected with their own interests of particular moment in art. They create and implement art lessons as their projects in art. These teachers are artists in their own right and their classes (may be) form a part of the contemporary art processes.

Another feature shared by all the teachers was excessive self-criticism; everyone addressed in connection with their research explained to me that he will hardly be useful as he „does not understand anything about teaching methodologies”.

Art-based art teaching is characterized by the teacher’s need to create ever new and unprecedented situations. None of the interviewed teachers can use one and the same classroom task for a longer period of time. Why is it so? I believe that the active creative involvement in the study process typical for the teacher-artist comes through most transparently in this group of replies.

In my research I would like to highlight these individual experiences of teachers, to view them in connection with art and to highlight teaching of art as a branch of art, not only teaching methodology. Therefore I have called it arts-based teaching of art.

“(…) I have developed the key conception of “teacher as artist”. My teaching practice can be my art. I wonder how to integrate artistry and rationality in my teaching and in my life, and why before I have been afraid to use my creative abilities as a teacher.”¹

Interviews with six teachers of art from Latvia and Finland have been used further in the text.

I asked teachers for their opinion on what activities should be carried out at classes of art and how do they invent tasks for their students. Their views on the activities present a view which allows

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¹ Margie Buttignol, 1999.
drawing conclusions about the connection between teaching and creating art. The prevailing opinion is about a prolific number of ideas for art lessons’ activities being there all around us.

“I chose the things that interest, move, excite myself, things that I myself would like to do. For example, a line, do you know how much kids would love to scratch a car’s side with a nail and then get the scratch rusty. I have to invent something that is as attractive as getting a car scratched.”

(Andris)

“The situation can be different each time and it will show what to do.”

(Ausma)

“I think that it is very important to make mistakes and to risk following the wrong path; in this way we can succeed in finding something new and important in art.”

(Riitta)

“Tasks come by improvisation, we debate and then the task has already arrived by itself.”

(Martins)

“I come up with an endless number of ideas for tasks and I cannot even take them all up.”

(Baiba)

“These are the students who show what I should do. Occasionally I take new ideas for tasks from accidents and my mistakes. All things that surround us are worth a task.”

(Ausma)

“The tasks somehow arrive by themselves. I see good tasks everywhere.”

(Anita)

Riitta’s story
“I bought this boot from antique shop. I find it very special, if to compare with other things, when I put it on the table and everyone concentrates in large size drawing with charcoal. It’s more than just a boot. There is something what I think they will learn about a language of materials, which is my main point. I think it is my duty - not to say so much, but give them possibility to see and feel. That is why I keep this old boot.”

Andris’ story
“I see Fiebig’s (modernist painter) triangle villages and spruces, then I start to draw these lines and think – where I have seen something like this? Then I remember, similar grid is in sewing patterns! Task for students is almost ready. There are more possibilities for Fiebig’s paintings study– colored wizened, crannied mud, crannied old leather briefcase, elephant’s skin – the main thing is to remember, what it reminds me.
I have idea to create green areas and flower-beds in my town Talsi similar to Fiebig’s painting. I would like to become gardener”.

“Real art is when a kid is kicking a tin can around a sandbox; the engine turns so fast that saliva is coming up in foam. When you start teaching that, it is all already over. I think that if a teacher can
participate with his can, this is the creative process or even art. Sandboxes and cans will change later, but the foam must be real”. (Andris)

The teacher-artist can belong to the contemporary art scene, if we consider his work in the context of dialogical or community arts. Such an angle of research could deliver new findings about contemporary art education.

How to form a link between the classes of art and contemporary art - to which epoch does the format in which teacher does it belong? Being aware that the dialogue, active engagement of the viewer in communication, organisation of different happenings, revision of art forms and techniques, unexpected ways of addressing the audience, etc., are all important elements of contemporary art, I believe that part of teacher-artists’ experiences could turn out as pertaining to the environment of contemporary art.

Relational aesthetics, formulated by Nicolas Bourriaud², highlights the importance of mutual contacts of people, relations, interactivity and engagement in the contemporary, so-called relational art. Bourriaud describes relational art as “a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space” ²

Teacher-artist, making use of examples of art from any epoch, quite as from everyday life, politics, nature, etc., can incorporate all of that into his class of art, which as a form itself is very characteristic of contemporary art.

Contemporary art seeks new paths in places that have traditionally been excluded from the world of art. Definitely, classes of art at school are among these locations. It is possible that research in the individual experiences of teachers-artists will also lit the road to different methods of teaching art, if such are possible.

Bourriaud presents the question: “(...) how can we produce singularity and meaning from this chaotic mass of objects, names, and references that constitutes our daily life?” ³

That could be my following question to teachers of art.

References


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² Nicolas Bourriaud, 2002.
³ Nicolas Bourriaud, 2005.