

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Most of the information gathered during the process of interviewing Bangkok teachers dealt with issues of a conceptual nature. Questions were asked which demanded a subjective response based on feelings, opinions, motives and perceptions as opposed to matters of fact. Although there was no reason for those interviewed to misrepresent the truth, a system of cross-referencing was included in the questions to test the reliability of the responses by asking similar questions in a number of various ways. As a result, the data should be an accurate reflection of the values held by teachers in the nation's capital.

This chapter's analysis is divided into three major parts: past, present and future. In other words, an attempt is made to determine what motives were held by teachers in the past, what changes might have taken place to provide a base for current incentives, and how teaching might be seen as a factor which affects a person's future.

5.1 PAST MOTIVATION

The assessment of past motivation can be a difficult task for a number of reasons. The passage of time often dims our memory so that we may not remember exactly what we were thinking when an important project was begun many years before. Although it is not unreasonable to assume that the human mind can play tricks on our retrospection, the collected data should be accurate for a number of reasons. First, people become teachers only after having proved themselves to be capable of accurately remembering a large amount of material. Teachers do not have weak minds, but are mentally exercised on a daily basis. Secondly, active teachers are only able to maintain their position in the classroom when they continue to show themselves in control of their senses. When senility begins to take its toll and memory fades badly, teachers are expected to retire to less demanding activities. None of those interviewed in this project showed any sign of feebleness or decline, however

All 124 teachers were asked a series of questions that dealt with their past. For example, questions regarding parents and other family members who may have been teachers and positive and/or negative experiences while in school were presented in addition to a very pointed question which dealt with their personal decision to enter the field of education. Although not every question resulted in significant insight, the following discussion summarizes the most important responses.

5.1.1 “Why were you first interested in becoming a teacher?”

This was an open-ended question which allowed for a variety of answers which covered the entire spectrum of human motives. The results of this question were grouped and divided into the three broad areas of those who became teachers because they 1) wanted to help others, 2) had motives which were classified as personal, and 3) those who initially had not planned to become teachers at all.

Table 5.1: Why were you first interested in becoming a teacher?

Self	56	(45.1%)
Unplanned	39	(31.5%)
Help Others	27	(21.8%)
N/A	2	(1.6%)
Total	124	(100%)

Human nature being what it is, it was noticeable that almost half the people interviewed were drawn to professions in education for basically personal reasons. Specific answers included the attraction of financial security and benefits, a desire to have control and authority over other people, and longing for the respect of society in general. In essence, these motives indicate a personal mentality, and do not usually produce the finest teachers.

There were about 22% of the respondents who claimed a more noble goal in that they wanted to become teachers in order to help others. Some

specified a desire to teach the disadvantaged or handicapped, while others merely wanted to provide a service to their community or the nation.

The most startling response to this first question had to do with the large number of teachers who admitted that they did not plan to enter the field of education. Their decision to become a teacher was based on some coincidence or external force which channeled them in a direction they did not originally intend to go. This information concurs with Prayat Punong-ong, who reports that about 140,000 applicants will be sitting for university entrance examinations this year, while only 40,000 seats are available. (*Bangkok Post*, June 4, 1995:23) What happens to those who do not qualify for one of the twenty-two closed universities around the country? Some wind-up attending one of the *Ratchapat* Institutes, formerly known as Teachers' Colleges, where the entrance requirements and tuition costs are much less than private universities.

There does appear to be some improvement being gradually made regarding guidance programs in Bangkok schools. When the results of this question are broken down into various age-groups, it becomes evident that in the last thirty years, beginning teachers have enjoyed a better understanding of what they wanted to do with their lives than their predecessors did. Percentage wise, there is much less indecision shown by those who have recently entered the field of education.

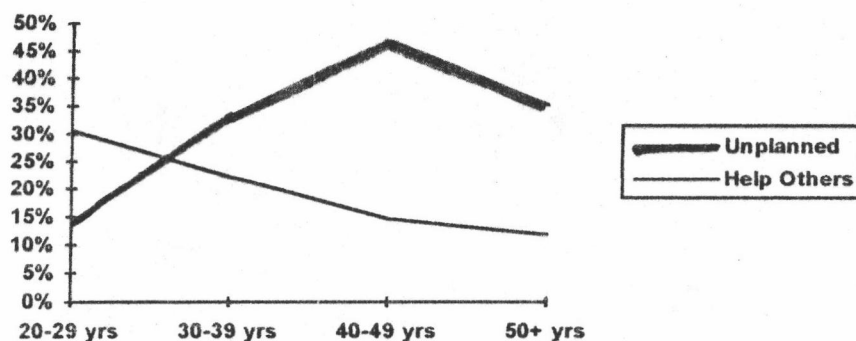


Chart 5.1: Initial Interest vs. Age

Although up to 47% of those older than 30 years of age indicate that they had not planned to become teachers, only 13.9% of those under age 30 made the same claim. The Ministry of Education admitted that their past efforts at occupational guidance had been limited by financial restraints, but allowed that many of the private schools have now begun their own systems of counseling to help place students in appropriate fields.*

It is also interesting to note that age-groups with the highest level of people who had not planned to become teachers also had the lowest level of those who were first motivated by the desire to help others. In other words, there appears to be a relationship between people planning to teach and noble motivation. Students are determining early in their lives that they want to help others by becoming teachers. It is encouraging to realize that there are more and more people entering teacher training programs with a driving desire to have a positive effect on society. These

* One counselor at a private high school in the Pratumwan area expressed dismay because the time available for career guidance was often interrupted by pressing disciplinary issues. As a result, the administration of an over-all guidance program proved impossible, although a trained staff was on hand.

individuals are willing to plan for and work toward that goal through the use of teacher certification. Thus there is hope that in the future, those entering the field of education will have a more clear vision of their task and be better prepared to cope with the pressures of students in the classroom.

5.2 PRESENT FEELINGS AND MOTIVATION

There were a number of questions included in the interview schedule which addressed the current mind-set of Bangkok teachers. The interviews began with broad questions of a general nature and proceeded to more specific inquiry. As the scope narrowed, opportunities were given for those interviewed to come up with their own answers. During the final stages of this section, they were asked to rank a number of possible motives for teaching. These questions and answers will be examined separately.

5.2.1 “Do you feel good about your choice of profession?”

Approximately 83% of the teachers replied positively about their chosen occupation. The high level of job satisfaction indicated by these results was broad-based and proved consistent across the various age groups, standards of income and educational backgrounds. One statistic which attracted attention was the fact that of the twenty-one people who did not admit to feeling good about their profession, 71% of them had not planned to become teachers. Evidently this group felt trapped in a job



situation which they had not anticipated or aspired to, and were sorry that they had allowed themselves to get into such a predicament. Once again we can see the important role counselors can play in helping high school and college-age students with their career choices.

Table 5.2: Feel Good?

Yes	103	(83.%)
No	11	(8.9%)
Partially	9	(7.3%)
N/A	1	(0.8%)
Total	124	(100%)

5.2.2 “What is the best thing about being a teacher?”

In an effort to be more specific about current feelings, a second question was asked, “What is the best thing about being a teacher?” No suggestions were offered, and the respondent was expected to come up with his own answers. The results were again varied, but can be classified into four basic groups:

1. Student oriented answers (63.7%) indicated that the students themselves were the best thing about teaching. Gratification at having the opportunity to work with young people and influence them in a good manner was a concept typical to this group.
2. Teacher oriented replies (12.9%) were those that addressed a love of instruction and doing something at which the teacher was proficient.

Although most of these comments were very positive, there were a few responses indicating a sense of pride which accompanied the teacher's ability to be the center of attention.

3. The group entitled Respect (11.3%) consisted of answers which expressed the issues of status, respect and honor which normally come with the teacher's position.

4. Benefits oriented responses (9.68%) were those that mentioned salary, a stable income, housing or health care.

Of all four groups, three of them consider topics which directly affect the teacher. In a sense, these sub-groups might deserve to be consolidated into one large group because they express a strong feeling of self-concern. The fact that almost two-thirds of the teachers considered association with their students to be the best part of teaching shows strong commitment to the process of education, and should be encouraged.

Table 5.3: Best Thing about Teaching

Student	79	(63.7%)
Teacher	16	(12.9%)
Respect	14	(11.3%)
Benefits	12	(9.7%)
N/A	3	(2.4%)
Total	124	(100%)

These results also indicate a definite change of attitude among a number of people who admitted becoming teachers for personal reasons. (section 5.1.1) This motivation has now changed as two-thirds of the teachers are motivated by student-centered issues.

Upon investigation, there appears to be some interesting opinions held by teachers in the 30-40 year old age group. In giving their response to the query regarding the best part of being a teacher, only 47% of them credited the students as being most significant. This was the lowest total of all the age groups, and a full 15% below the baseline average. At the same time, this age group was unique in that they had the highest number of people who considered benefits as most important.

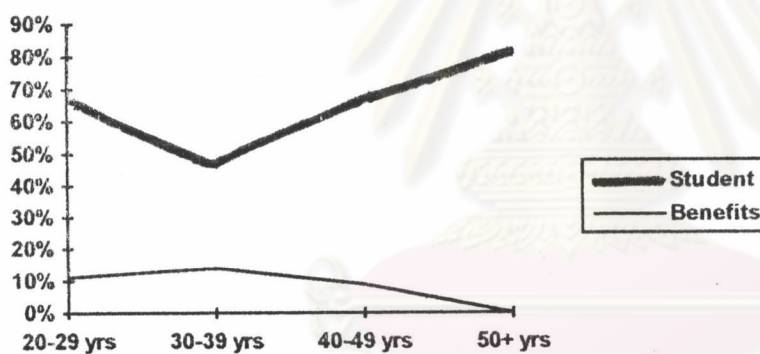


Chart 5.2 The best thing about teaching

At this age of their lives, many teachers reconsider their dedication in the classroom and choose to change occupations. By the time remaining teachers reach the older age groups, many of their financial concerns have been addressed and an increasing number of them are focusing on their students. With the exception of the 30-40 year olds, the longer a teacher is in the classroom, the more likely they are to be motivated by their

dedication to the students and less likely that they will be driven by such individual desires.

5.2.3 “Rank these motives for your being a teacher in terms of importance.”

In a continuing effort to determine the inner-most thoughts of the teachers interviewed, they were asked to rank six different motives in terms of importance. These suggested motives included helping the nation, gaining a position of respect, salary or benefits, helping the disadvantaged, making merit,^{*} and love for the subject matter. Only the top ranked motive was considered for the purposes of this study, although other more complicated calculations resulted in almost the exact same conclusions. The results remained very consistent across most groups, although there were a few variations which will be examined separately.

The baseline results are as follows:

1. Love of Subject Matter was the top-rated motive, with a total of 36 people ranking it as most important. This response shows a very strong commitment to the process of education and assumes that most teachers are in the classroom because they want to be. It is interesting that this motivation was especially strong among teachers who were older than 40 years of age. This conclusion is consistent with the results from earlier

^{*} see comments and footnote associated with Table 5.4.

questions about job-satisfaction, and infers that most people who are dissatisfied with being a teacher are able to find employment elsewhere.

2. Closely behind with 28 responses was the motivation of Helping the Disadvantaged. This answer was actually the first choice of teachers younger than 40 years of age, but when figures were totaled, it slipped to second place. This shows a strong social conscience among Bangkok teachers, especially younger ones who might be working in less affluent schools. As teachers grow older, they might become slightly jaded towards economic needs and concentrate on what they consider to be more important reasons for providing instruction.

3. The third most popular choice of motivation was listed as Salary, Benefits with 17 selections. The gap between groups one and two above, and groups three, four, five and six below was significant, with only 12 people separating the last four.

4. A desire to Help the Nation was fourth with 14 first-place choices. There was some variation as the younger age groups made this their third choice, but overall the motive was only fourth.

5. Respect was the title of the next-to-last group with a total of 12 votes. This motivation was defined as the position of respect which is gained by teachers in Thai society. This deference was more important for those in the 20-30 age group.

6. The least important of the possible selections was the specific motivation being sought in this research, that of Making Merit.* This topic collected only 5 votes and had less than half the tally of the next highest choice, indicating that it was not of prime interest to those interviewed.

Table 5.4: Rankings

Love of Subject	36	(29%)
Helping the Disadvantaged	28	(22.5%)
Salary, Benefits	17	(13.9%)
Helping the Nation	14	(11.2%)
Respect	12	(9.7%)
Making Merit*	5	(4%)
N/A	12	(9.7%)
Total	124	(100%)

There was a final choice left blank for the respondent to fill-in any other motivations he might feel appropriate, but this did not stimulate any notable insight. Typical suggestions included such offerings as “my parents liked it” and “innocence of youth”, which are mentioned here only in passing, and will not be considered in further analysis.

5.3 TEACHING AND THE FUTURE

The original purpose of this research was to see if the acquisition of merit was a significant motive in the lives of those who had dedicated themselves as teachers. A series of questions were designed to determine the religious make-up of those interviewed and learn how their spiritual

* It must be noted that the Thai term for “making merit” used during the collection of data was *taam bun*, which does not allow an accurate portrayal of teacher’s feelings on this topic. If the more appropriate term for “giving” (*dana*) had been used, it is likely that the choice of Making Merit would have been rated much higher. See also section 5.3.4.

values related to their occupational motivation. This final section is comprised of an analytical summary of how Bangkok teachers think their role in education might affect their own future state.

5.3.1 “Do you regularly make merit? In what ways?”

This introductory question was asked primarily to see if there was an awareness of *kamma* in the daily lives of Bangkok teachers. While it may be remembered that over 94% of those interviewed claimed to be Buddhists, only 51% asserted that they regularly made merit. Although there was another 15% who reported making merit occasionally, that still left one third (33.06%) of those interviewed who said they never made merit. That is considered to be a significant number of people whose initial response was to deny the relevancy of merit in their own lives.

Table 5.5: Do you regularly make merit?

Yes	64	(51.6%)
No	41	(33.1%)
Sometimes	19	(15.3%)
Total	124	(100%)

The follow-up question dealing with methods of making merit tended to qualify the above mentioned statistics, as less than 6% of those interviewed repeated their denial of ever making merit at all. (Table 5.6) Of the 41 individuals who had previously claimed to never be involved in the making of merit, 34 of them now volunteered at least one way that they performed the very action they had denied. It must be assumed then, that the frequency of their merit-making was too low to actually qualify as such



in their own minds, or that their method of making merit was not typical of main-stream Buddhism and they preferred to disassociate themselves from the merit-making mentality found in society. Several people volunteered more than one example of their meritorious work, but for statistical purposes, only their first choice was considered.

Table 5.6: How do you make merit?

Sangha Related	74	(59.7%)
Giving (<i>dana</i>)	24	(19.4%)
Helping Disadvantaged	15	(12.1%)
Scholastic related	4	(3.2%)
N/A	7	(5.6%)
Total	124	(100%)

The examples of merit-making as given in the interviews were all legitimate forms of charity. They were typically focused in the well-being of other people or the furtherance of the Buddhist religion. Almost 60% of the responses were Sangha-related, the most prevalent being the offering of gifts to monks and other rites centered around the temple. Only 3.23% of the initial replies strictly related their merit-making to scholastic efforts such as teaching or helping to supply funds for family members to be able to attend school.

It must be admitted that there remains a large area where the dual concepts of general giving (*dana*) and the specific giving of knowledge (*witthayadana*) overlap. In addition, there were some whose first response of Helping Disadvantaged included the qualifying idea that they were helping disadvantaged people by teaching. When the three similar groups

of Giving, Helping Disadvantaged and Scholastic are united, the potential percentage of people relating teaching to merit rises to over 34%.

The relationship between *dana* and *witthayadana* appears even more significant when the Sangha Related responses are closely examined. Only a minuscule 6.7% of the interviewees whose first response was Sangha- related failed to mention *dana* somewhere in their response, while 93.2% of them mentioned giving in some form. Whether the intention was expressed by giving food to monks, giving money to build and maintain temples or giving to beggars, students and children, these teachers specified their desire to give.

5.3.2 “Do you think teaching is a source of merit for you?”

After having asked for general sources of merit, a more direct question dealt with the possibility of teaching being a fountainhead for the collection of merit. It should not be surprising that over 85% of the teachers replied in the affirmative, since these same people had already shown their inclination to give. The fact that the idea of relating merit and teaching was not volunteered but in effect had to be drawn from the teachers might nullify some of the statistical impact, but if a portion of society esteems the act of teaching to be a source of merit, then perhaps there is room for the conviction to be addressed in a more dynamic way.

Table 5.7: Is teaching a source of merit?

Yes	101	(81.5%)
No	15	(12.1%)
Some	6	(4.8%)
N/A	2	(1.6%)
Total	124	(100%)

It should be noted that this question was phrased in such a way that it dealt specifically with the way in which the person being interviewed saw his own work. People who did not take their own teaching seriously or were in the classroom for personal reasons might not consider their work to be meritorious in nature. This is a legitimate answer which speaks to the individual's situation, and does not address the possibility that merit might be available to other teachers who approach their occupation with a different state of mind.

5.3.3 “What is your definition of *witthayadana*?”

This was an open-ended question which resulted in a wide assortment of responses. It became obvious that the concept of *witthayadana* is one with which Bangkok teachers are familiar. Although the progressive way in which the questions were developed may have contributed to such a clear understanding at this juncture of the interview, the point remains that almost everyone could offer some interpretation of the word's meaning. The results of this question were catalogued and definitions were divided into one of three main groups:

1. The largest group consisted of 44.3% of the teachers who emphasized giving or teaching without expecting anything in return. Some in this group implied that teaching done for money disqualified the work under the terms of their definition, while others thought that the concept was still valid if the teachers did not expect anything from the students themselves. Parents, school administrations or governments who provided support were somehow seen as incidental to the student-teacher relationship and independent from the concept of *witthayadana*.

2. A second group of 38.7% considered *witthayadana* to be the act of giving or teaching. There were some general qualifiers such as giving with sincerity, sacrificial giving, giving to children or giving knowledge, but the unifying factor was that the term focused outside of self. Other people were identified as the recipients of something that was good and honorable.

The first two groups clearly understood the expression in terms similar to the definitions provided in section 3.4. Their numbers were very similar and distinct from the last group.

3. A small group of 11.3% provided a slight wrinkle in the definition as they stressed teaching or helping those who were less advantaged. The idea expressed was that the concept of *witthayadana* is valid only when a person is helping bring others up in society. Such phrases as helping “ordinary people”, those that “do not have”, “those with problems”, “those who know nothing” or “can not care for themselves” were typical of this

group. Although it is difficult to avoid class distinctions in this matter, there seemed to be an expressed desire to reach down and help those who find themselves at a disadvantage.

Table 5.8: What is your definition of *witthayadana*?

Giving/Teaching without Expecting Remuneration	55	(44.3%)
Giving/Teaching	48	(38.7%)
Teaching/Helping the Disadvantaged	14	(11.3%)
N/A	7	(5.7%)
Total	124	(100%)

There was an interesting trend which appeared when tracking the definition of *witthayadana* across the scale of ages. As the teachers advanced in age, they became much more convinced that an important element necessary in understanding this topic dealt with the expectation of remuneration.

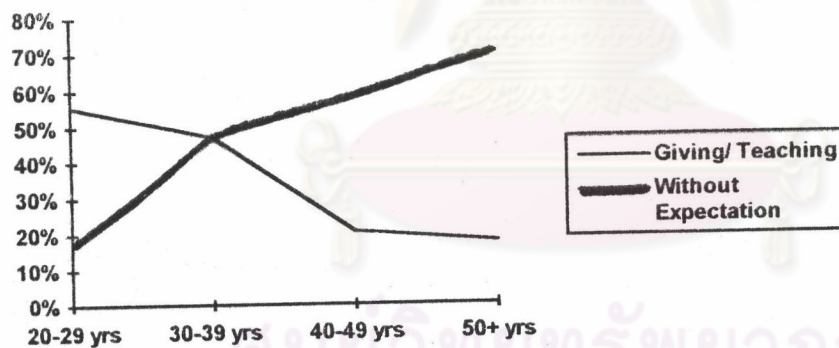


Chart 5.3: *Witthayadana* Definition vs. Age

Almost 60% of the younger teachers limited their definition of *witthayadana* to the classic understanding which deals with giving and teaching. A much smaller group of only 16.7% mentioned the issue of teaching without regard for payment.

Teachers in the older groups, however, seemed to feel just the opposite about the meaning of term. Less than 20% confined their response to giving or teaching, while more than 70% thought *witthayadana* was intricately related to teaching for free.

There are a couple reasons why this proportion should exist, but the most important deals with recent changes in education. The training of the nation's children has become a big business. Not only have exclusive private schools proliferated throughout the city, but university preparation courses, special language tutors, computer instructors and representatives from international schools can be found jousting for their share of the Thai educational baht. Some classroom teachers have been caught up in the excitement and see their position as just one of several occupations which provide an income. Such a situation is quite foreign to the traditionalist who understands the teacher's exemplary position in society and fears the near-sacred principle of *witthayadana* in danger of being trampled in the rush for gold.

Another reason for the different views of the concept may simply deal with a sense of maturity which develops through the years. Teachers in the older groups are more likely to be aware of the intangible aspects of their occupation. They have been given opportunity to speak for charitable purposes on many occasions and as such, recognize the legitimate role *witthayadana* plays in such situations. Older teachers treasure the

satisfaction which comes following the times they teach without getting any payment for their work.

Newly certified teachers on the other hand, do not have significant experience and are not often asked to make such presentations. As a result, the basis of their understanding is more likely to deal with the more tangible aspects of teacher-student relationships.

5.3.4 “Does the principle of *witthayadana* apply to what you are doing? How?”

The final question in the interview dealt with the application of *witthayadana* in the everyday life of the teacher. The results are somewhat predictable and entirely consistent with the majority of teachers who previously considered teaching a source of merit, as more than 75% of the teachers interviewed claimed to be performing *witthayadana*. After adding almost 10% who thought the concept “partially” applied to their lives, only 10.5% of the teachers remained convinced that their work did not qualify as being this distinguished form of endeavor.

Table 5.9: Does *witthayadana* apply to you?

Yes	93	(75%)
No	13	(10.5%)
Some	12	(9.7%)
N/A	6	(4.8%)
Total	124	(100%)



The impressive number of teachers who associated their work with the collection of merit should be understood in the light of the spirit of *dana*. This giving attitude is found in all aspects of Thai culture and is more likely the motivation which should be examined in the lives of Bangkok teachers. Although the concept of *witthayadana* is a valid one and appreciated by many (section 5.3.3), it is highly specific and only part of an overall mentality of generosity.*

There was also an interesting curve which appeared in the responses of teachers when related to the ages of their students. Starting in kindergarten, teachers were 100% in agreement that teaching was a source of merit and that it applied to what they were doing. This confidence began to wane according to the results from teachers in primary and secondary schools, finally reaching a low of 70% among university professors. A reason for this disparity was hard to determine until it was noted that instructors in technical schools reported feeling much the same as teachers in primary schools. It appears that the concept, as understood by the teachers, is related to the age and educational level of the students. As was noted in Table 5.8, there was a percentage of teachers who considered their work to be related to *witthayadana* only when they were teaching students of a "lower" level. While 30% of university professors did not think they were performing *witthayadana*, some of them voiced the opinion that their work did not apply because they were teaching adults (or near adults) who were closer to their own age and educational level.

* For further discussion of the relationship between *dana* and *witthayadana*, see section 6.1.

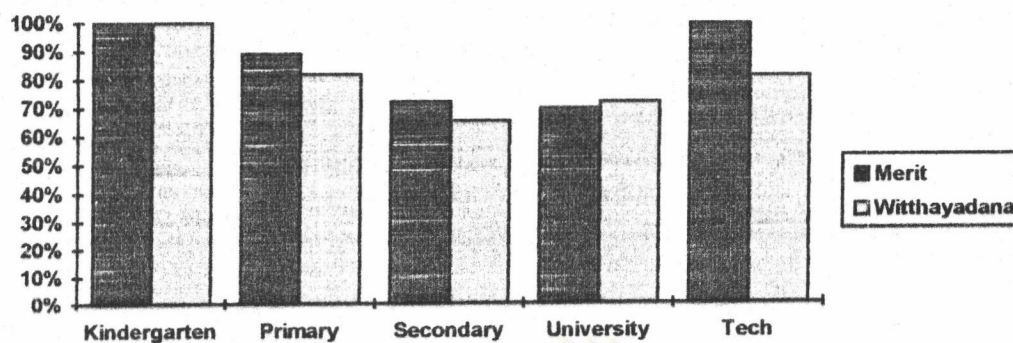


Chart 5.4 Age taught: Is teaching a source of merit for you? Yes
Does *withthayadana* apply to what you do? Yes

This assumption, relating the level of a teacher's class to his understanding of *withthayadana*, is supported by the results gathered from cross-referencing the above mentioned issues with the respondent's educational degree. (Chart 5.5) Those with less than a Bachelor's degree were all convinced that their merit production was increased by teaching, while those with advanced degrees were somewhat less convinced of this possibility. Again it is assumed that those with more advanced degrees would be teaching students of a higher level. For some of those teachers, the education of students of a near equal level might not qualify as *withthayadana* in their own eyes.

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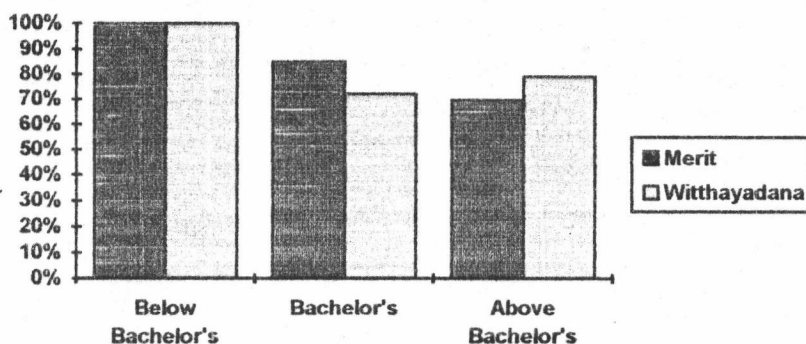


Chart 5.5 Education: Is teaching a source of merit for you? Yes
Does *withthayadana* apply to what you do? Yes

When asked for specific example of how *withthayadana* applied in their lives, 25% of the teachers modified the general “giving” or “teaching” responses with some indication of additional commitment on their part. Such terms as “sacrifice”, “earnestly”, “diligently” and “heart” appeared regularly, while a responsibility extending beyond the classroom was mentioned several times. In the minds of at least a fourth of the teachers, the mere act of giving knowledge does not necessarily qualify as *withthayadana*. It becomes necessary for the teacher to put his heart and soul into his work and provide for the students something more than just the minimum effort demanded by the employers. Perhaps it is this uncommon commitment or quality giving which provides the necessary ingredient to transform the mundane classroom experience into a rewarding adventure with satisfaction in this life and the hope for enhanced existence in the future.

Table 5.10: How does *witthayadana* apply to you?

Giving	35	(28.2%)
Quality Giving	31	(25%)
Giving Knowledge	25	(20.2%)
N/A	33	(26.6%)
Total	124	(100%)

5.4 SUMMARY

In summary, the data examined in this chapter reveals important information about teachers in Bangkok. While almost half of those interviewed admitted being first attracted to their profession for basically personal reasons (Table 5.1), their opinions and motivations have changed significantly. In spite of the current economic difficulties, a vast majority (83%) now feel good about their work (Table 5.2) and over 60% of them mention dedication to their students as their main reason for teaching. (Table 5.3) Such focused considerations as money and respect have been replaced by motivations relating to the helping the disadvantaged, love of subject matter and a desire to help the nation. (Table 5.4)

Looking to the future, the majority of teachers are quick to admit that they consider their work to be directly related to *dana* and the production of merit. Although they may differ on the relative importance of payment for teaching (Table 5.8), they unite behind the possibility that teaching provides them with a source of merit. (Charts 5.4) A number of teachers insist, however, that true *witthayadana* is performed only when an extra level of commitment is put into the activity or the lessons are directed

at those who are less fortunate. While some statistics indicate that the more educated teachers may be less inclined to claim meritorious rewards than their peers who have less education (Chart 5.5), the lowest group still had more than 70% who related their efforts to merit production. These are significant figures which show the strong base of support for *witthayadana*, teaching and merit.

The synopsis of this information might indicate a type of development which occurs in the life of some teachers in Bangkok, as they mature and become more satisfied with their work. Although for some, the process may have begun as merely a job with important physical benefits, the teacher's role in society seems to evolve into a labor of love which provides for them certain intangible benefits such as the accumulation of merit.



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