



# A study of teaching and learning to promote the spirituality in learning and work of nursing students

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## Abstract

The nursing practice of nursing students is a key part of the curriculum of the Bachelor of Nursing Program. Students should have strong spirituality in learning and work (SLW) for effective practice in nursing care. This study aimed to explore the perspectives of improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning to enhance the SLW of nursing students. Data were collected from February to March 2023. A qualitative approach with an in-depth interview was conducted with three outstanding award nurses, three ward head nurses, and three nursing instructors. The instruments comprised the semi-structured interview guides and the field notes. Content analysis was performed to analyze the qualitative data. A study of teaching and learning to promote the spirituality in learning and work of nursing students consisted of four categories: (1) a spiritual perspective in learning and working; (2) teaching and learning to promote SLW; (3) practical teaching and learning values; and (4) commitment in the nursing profession. Teaching methods should emphasize being a good role model for teachers and a mentor in nursing practice. Nursing students should be allowed to reflect on their feelings about nursing practice with positive explanations for both nursing personnel and the placement. The results of the study would be applied to develop a curriculum for students pursuing further studies in health.

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## Introduction

Health systems are currently facing a shortage of operational manpower worldwide as a result of a change in epidemics and the incidence of various illnesses, both the occurrence of new and recurring diseases, and in

particular, entering an aging society. These situations require manpower to serve people with illnesses, resulting in a shortage of healthcare personnel, especially nursing professionals who are a crucial force in driving the healthcare system.

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The World Health Organization reports that the global number of nurses is 27.9 million, and there is a shortage of 5.9 million nurses who are in great demand (Jurić, 2021). In Thailand, there is also a shortage of professional nurses. A 10-year study on the need for manpower (2009–2019) has demonstrated that there is a need for a nurse-to-population ratio of 1:400. This is based on the utilization of healthcare services by approximately 65 million people in Thailand. However, at present, there are only 118,560 registered nurses nationwide, with more than 50,000 shortages (Office of Policy and Strategy, 2021).

It is expected that the shortage of registered nurses in Thailand will continue to intensify in the future as professional nurses are likely to be an elderly workforce. Forty-three percent will retire within the next five years (Chaikong et al., 2020).

At the same time, higher education institutions have accelerated the production of professional nurses to be able to meet the needs of the national health system. Nursing students also had a dropout rate of 6.17 percent in the middle of the years (2015–2019) (Loywirat et al., 2019). The reason for resignation was due to stress and inability to adapt to the new environment. Students are pressured and faced with a ward atmosphere that is full of suffering as well as having to practice complex nursing skills. Thus, patience is required (Bandasak et al., 2021; Kaiwikaikosol et al., 2015). When nursing students have a spirit of study, they are able to cope with problems and express their behaviors in a positive way. This may result in a decrease in the dropout rate of nursing students in the future (Rezapour-Mirsaleh & Aghabagheri, 2020).

Groups of nursing students are bolstering the nursing profession today and will become professional nurses in the future. These students must pass the required number of teaching hours in clinical practice on a high ward equivalent to theoretical knowledge. When nursing students take up practical training, they must make personal and environmental adjustments. It is a new experience that requires knowledge from theory to be applied to practice. This leads to a situation that challenges their abilities. There is a fear of insufficient knowledge in nursing practice with patients/clients, resulting in stress and anxiety regarding situations that have not yet occurred (Pathomjaruwat et al., 2018). When nursing students are stressed, anxiety affects their learning and coping performance (Hwang et al., 2021). Nursing students are found to have high levels of stress when participating in hands-on training. When nursing students who are practicing in the ward have little passion for the nursing profession, much adjustment is required in studying and practicing. This is the main reason for dropouts.

Therefore, teaching and learning should create a bond in the nursing profession to be passionate about the work that one performs. In this study, such is called the spiritual at learning and work. This means recognizing the value of being a nursing student; being part of the nursing team; and there is a clear goal in the practice of nursing students (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). The spirit of studying and working is a crucial aspect of the work. If you value the spirit of working with people in the workplace, it will help reduce stress, anxiety and help you to adjust well. This will encourage personnel in that organization to develop themselves and increase their work potential (Robbins & Judge, 2011).

Management of teaching and learning in the Bachelor of Nursing Science Program should add a spiritual dimension at learning and work in the teaching and learning process for students. This can encourage students to have spirit at learning and work. When students have a learning and working spirit, it may help them have better academic achievement. This is a result of a positive attitude toward the nursing profession and a great motivation to study (Van Viet, 2022).

Thus, nursing institutions that produce professional nurses should emphasize promoting the spirit at learning and work among nursing students. It will give nursing students self-worth and pride in their education in the nursing profession. This is a preparation for entering the nursing profession in order to create professional engagement. As a result, professional nurses who are encouraged to exhibit the spiritual at learning and work will persist in their profession; perform duties with willingness; and be happy to work. Such is expressed in terms of service behaviors with heart. This will lead to the development of the quality of nursing practice and further efficient services.

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## Literature Review

Based on a review of spirituality in learning and work (SLW), it is an awareness and acceptance of the value of the spiritual life of human beings born and nurtured from working at work. Value and meaning arise from being a part of or living together as a community in the organization. Considering this definition, the important elements of the spiritual dimension of work can be separated into three pivotal parts: inner life, meaningful work, and a sense of connection (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). And, make a supreme effort to find the ultimate goal of living. This would evolve into creating good relationships as well as connecting with the organization's core beliefs and values (Mitroff & Denton, 1999).

The spirit of learning and working has a correlation with the performance of nursing students. This can increase students' involvement in the work and increase their attention to patients' care (Iqbal et al., 2020; Jin & Lee, 2020; Mohamed et al., 2021).

A systematic review by Wei et al. (2020) found that there was a strong correlation between the performance and caring behavior of nurses involving work intention, nurse competencies, job satisfaction, and professional ethics. Nursing institutions should support students to develop positive behaviors by promoting the SLW of nursing students.

A study by Mariani et al. (2020) found that encouraging the academic and working spirit of nursing students helps them to love and have more engagement in practice sites. It is evident that the learning and working spirit is beneficial to students and health institutions. Therefore, personnel should be encouraged to have a spirit of study and work. Spirituality of learning and work (SLW) is crucial to improve the quality of teaching and learning courses. It is a process of conveying the spirit of being in a nursing profession through teaching. It will enable nursing students to believe in morality, ethics, and positively interact with learning (Nasrollahi et al., 2020).

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## Methodology

This was a qualitative study of narrative research type to explore perspectives on the teaching and learning to promote the spirituality in learning and work of nursing students.

### Participants

A total of nine participants were interviewed. These participants were divided into three groups: (1) outstanding nurses in nursing practice at their national levels. Criteria of outstanding nurses in nursing practice: A registered nurse who is a winner at the national level such as "Srisangwan Award" or Ministry of Public Health Award, (2) nursing instructors, and (3) ward head nurses. All these informants had experience in supervising nursing students in the wards for more than 5 years.

### Ethical Consideration

Prior to conducting this study, ethics approval from Srinakharinwirot University was obtained (approval number SWUEC/E/G-022/2023). The researcher explained to participants the study's objectives in detail;

the storage of confidential information; and the presentation of overall findings. All participants gave written consent to participate in the study after they got an opportunity to ask any questions and understood clearly.

### Data Collection

Data were collected from February to March 2023. Once participants' informed consent was obtained, semi-structured, face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with participants. Interviews with participants took between 30 and 60 minutes each and one or two times until the data reached saturation. The interviews were audio-recorded by the researcher after permission was obtained. Two digital audio recorders were used to record the interviews to capture the content of the data. The researcher also recorded written interview notes during the interview. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. In this study, the researchers ensured the study's credibility through data and investigator triangulation. Data triangulation involved comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information regarding the spirituality in learning and work of nursing students from the perspectives of nine registered nurses by using a semi-structured interview. Furthermore, the informants have three different positions/roles as nursing instructors, ward head nurses, and outstanding nurses in nursing practice.

Investigator triangulation was also used to ensure credibility. In the current study, content analysis was used for each transcript, and then two supervisors independently reviewed an analyzed transcript. The researcher and his supervisors then met for a discussion about the study's findings as well as providing the researcher with guidance and feedback about the findings.

### Instruments

The researcher employed a key research tool using semi-structured interview questions for an in-depth interview. A qualitative semi-structured interview guide was developed by the researcher by reviewing the literature in order to cover the study's objectives. The semi-structured interview guide is open-ended regarding the study of teaching and learning to promote the spirituality in learning and work of nursing students. The interview questions then were checked for content accuracy (Polit & Beck, 2012) by five experts who specialize in the SLW; as well as the management of teaching and learning for nurses and caring behaviors of caring. The content validity (IOC) was 0.93.

Data Analysis

In this study, conventional content analysis was performed with interview transcripts (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and each transcript was transcribed by the researcher. This process took between three and four hours for a 60–90-minute interview. The researcher used the following strategies to check the quality of the data: (1) the researcher verified the reliability of the data by double-checking the data with the informants (2) during data collection with all interviewees, the investigators read the taped interviews from the verbatim recordings and qualitatively analyzed the data for consensus. Furthermore, five experts in teaching and learning regarding SLW checked for accuracy as well as to ensure rigor.

Results

Interviewees' Characteristics

A total of nine participants were interviewed: three outstanding nurses in practice; three nursing instructors; and three head nurses. Almost 90 percent of interviewees were female, and the average age of the participants was 55 years (48–59 min-max). All participants had more than five years of experience supervising nursing students at wards. Their work experience was between 25 and 40 years (Mean = 34.55 years). Almost 70 percent graduated with a master's degree, and more than a quarter of the participants achieved a doctoral degree.

Result

Findings from the Semi-Structured Interviews

There were four general themes identified from the participants' perspectives of teaching and learning to promote the spirituality in learning and work of nursing students. These themes included a spiritual perspective in learning and working; teaching and learning to promote a spirit of learning and work; the value of practical teaching and learning; and commitment to the nursing profession. These themes are shown in Table 1.

1. Perspective on SLW

The spiritual at learning and work is a method or a process of thought for studying and working happily with attentiveness, determination, enthusiasm, and responsibility for studying and performing assigned tasks without being forced to do so.

1) Having a spirit of study and work must be passionate and interested in studying nursing. This will lead to passion and attention to learning. It is a driving force for students to strive to study and work. What students do, believing it to be advantageous to do so, develops their value.

2) Assessment of the spiritual at learning and work is a method of observing behaviors derived from teaching both in theory and in practice. This can be assessed from curiosity, eagerness to learn, determination to work without waiting, and acting conscientiously. A student, for example, caring for a patient wearing a ventilator. It will be noticed that when sucking phlegm, the patient is restless, students' tears will flow. This situation will be noticed if the students are sensitive to the feelings of the patients.

Table 1 Challenges of findings

Challenges	Examples Expressions
1. Spiritual perspective	
1.1 Having SLW	<p>"There is a sincerity, attention, enthusiasm, and responsibility when working." (Informant 1).</p> <p>"Responsible for the variety of reports assigned. Spirituality comes from internal intention. No one is forcing him/her to do it." (Informant 6).</p> <p>"I am passionate about and interested in studying nursing." (Informant 8).</p>
1.2 Assessment of SLW	<p>"Based on curiosity, there is an intention referring to his/her intention to prepare actively when students come to meet the teachers. Also, students prepare to recite vocabulary, or we will arrange a meeting first." (Informant 2).</p> <p>"Mental aspects are not frustrated. Students should smile and accept what the patient requests; be willing to do; have a mind that wants to give care; and give nursing care what the patient requests." (Informant 5).</p> <p>"Have a kind heart to give care for patients. Have empathy for the patients; understand patients' emotions; and have a gentle heart." (informant 8).</p>

Table 1 Continued

Challenges	Examples Expressions
2. Teaching and learning to have SLW	
2.1 How to create SLW	<p><i>“Teachers are role models who can pass on examples to students to learn. There’s a technique to blame, but it’s not a punishment. Rather, it’s a chance.”</i></p> <p>(Informant 1).</p> <p><i>“Reflection after every practice, teachers will fill in what should promote the spirit of learning and working.”</i></p> <p>(Informant 3).</p> <p><i>“Allow students to practice meditating or teach students with a low-pitched voice while they have been trained at wards. Providing students with self-thinking hours or sharing their learning within the group. Teachers should practice teaching reflective questions and developing mental well-being”</i></p> <p>(Informant 6).</p> <p><i>“Asking students to tell what their goals in life are; what is the reasons why they chose to study nursing; what they view and how they perceive the nursing profession. These inquiries would help students commence to understand the value of the nursing profession and understand clearly.”</i></p> <p>(Informant 8).</p>
2.2 Factors Promoting SLW	<p><i>“The ward must be ready to be a good placement, in terms of location and personnel. Students should learn and be trained by good nurses. There is a good role model that can be followed and applied in practice”</i></p> <p>(Informant 1).</p> <p><i>“There should be a positive environment in which to support students’ learning. The atmosphere of learning should be generous, and being friends with each other.”</i></p> <p>(Informant 4).</p> <p><i>“Good teaching requires both sides. That is, the teachers would like to teach as well as students would like to study. Thus, there is something in between. The students will have enjoyment if they are not much pressured by the teachers. The students should be also allowed to discuss any problems with the teachers as helping each other.”</i></p> <p>(Informant 7).</p>
3. The value of practical teaching	
3.1 Appreciating the practical teaching and learning	<p><i>“If students can practice nursing care from real situations at placement, students will be able to answer questions under real-life situations that have different contexts than in the classes.”</i></p> <p>(Informant 1).</p> <p><i>“Teaching a nurse, a nursing student has been trained to give care to patients, not done with paper. Therefore, practical training is the real field from which the theory has been learned.”</i></p> <p>(Informant 8).</p> <p><i>“Students will see and can view genuine illnesses and the expression on the face of the patients’ fear. Practicing in nursing makes the students themselves strong and confident in their work.”</i></p> <p>(Informant 9).</p>
3.2 Creation of value in practical training on the ward	<p><i>“Changing the attitude in order to begin leading students to value perceptions.”</i></p> <p>(Informant 3).</p> <p><i>“It’s a good opportunity to do internships. This job is an opportunity to learn and work as students can really look after the patients. They learned the theory and applied it to as many patients as possible.”</i></p> <p>(Informant 5).</p> <p><i>“If nursing students perform nursing care well, teachers should take responsibility by giving them appreciation. This compliment can make students feel proud.”</i></p> <p>(Informant 8).</p>
4. Commitment in the nursing profession	
4.1 Increase engagement in the nursing profession	<p><i>“If there is a good memory image in nursing practice, it will be positive vibes. It can give students a sense of commitment in the nursing profession.”</i></p> <p>(Informant 1).</p> <p><i>“Working as a team between nursing students and the healthcare team gives students a great sense of professional engagement. This is because students can think and act together to solve patients’ problems. Students will feel that they are part of the team.”</i></p> <p>(Informant 5).</p> <p><i>“Teamwork is associated with professional engagement. Working as a team helps each person. When helping each other; understanding each other, caring for each other, work happily. At work, they are warm and helpful like brothers and sisters.”</i></p> <p>(Informant 8).</p>

Table 1 Continued

Challenges	Examples Expressions
4.2 Reduce engagement in the nursing profession	<i>“The nurse in a ward is fierce, and students are pressured by senior nurses and teachers.”</i> (Informant 2).
	<i>“Students run away from work. The relationship will disappear.”</i> (Informant 4).
	<i>“Students have encountered stress with senior nurses scolding patients, risky procedures, and giving patients the wrong medication.”</i> (Informant 7).

2. Teaching and learning to have the spiritual at learning and work. It is a plan to create a teaching and learning model for nursing students in order to have the spirit of learning and working. It consists of teaching methods, teaching styles, and environments that nurture nursing students with the spirit of learning and working.

1) How to create SLW? This can start by using some questions to encourage students to realize their goals in life. These inquiries include the reasons to study in the nursing science program; and perspectives on the nursing profession in order to examine the ideas of students. By doing that, instructors will provide suggestions to fulfill the students’ spirit of studying and working. In particular, what teachers often use is self-reflection, and the teacher reflects positively on the students. Moreover, the students meditate; and using music therapy can help to prepare the mind well prior to commencing school and working. In most of the findings, it has also been found that having a teacher or a mentor is a good role model in spirituality, work, or patient care. It would help students to enhance their SLW.

2) Factors promoting SLW should pay great attention to the placement or sources of the internship. In addition, personnel in the training center should have a working spirit. This will create a positive environment, resulting in the spirituality of nursing students in learning and working; and being happy to work.

In terms of factors contributing to the spiritual at learning and work, educational institutions should choose a practical training center that is ready in terms of location, and personnel and has a good organizational culture. Furthermore, in order to create a good learning atmosphere for students, professional nurses should be good role models in giving patients cares with the spirit of being a nurse.

3. The value of practical teaching

Nursing students should have more awareness of the value of practical teaching as the nursing profession is professional to deal with patients. It is undeniable that the practical teaching of the Bachelor of Nursing Science Program (BNS) is crucial for students to have nursing

skills by being trained and capable of practicing nursing care with more confidence.

1) Appreciating practical teaching and learning practical training is very important in applying the knowledge learned in theory to practical applications. This would lead to learning and practicing critical thinking in situations that are practiced. Also, providing gestures to look after patients will not be the same as what is learned in all theoretical practices. Students who value practical teaching can apply knowledge gained from theoretical studies to practical practices. As a consequence, patients and relatives will receive effective nursing care.

2) Creation of value in practical training on the ward

Practical training is an opportunity for nursing students to be able to practice nursing care with patients’ complicated conditions. Some situations require nursing students to use various skills in nursing patients. Approaches for creating/improving value in practical training can be created as follows: (1) changing the perspective of practice; (2) learning opportunities on the ward; (3) developing a relaxed learning atmosphere; (4) receiving praise; and (5) generating pride in achievements patients’ care. These will allow students to value practical training on the ward.

4. Commitment to the nursing profession

Engagement in the profession arises from the interaction between nursing students and the healthcare team as teamwork. In particular, the nursing team has influence in promoting nursing students to have professional engagement by means of (1) coaching or teaching as brothers and sisters; (2) giving advice on nursing practice or work processes at wards; (3) good communication; (4) acceptance; (5) feeling of being part of a team; and (6) having self-worth. All these will lead to more engagement among nursing students in the nursing profession.

Meanwhile, when nursing students practiced nursing care on the ward, there were some negative factors that caused a reduction in nursing professional engagement. These factors involve (1) pressure from nurses on the



ward and supervisors; (2) poor first impression; (3) negative behaviors of the nursing team towards nursing students (4) poor healthcare team relationships.

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## Discussion

This study demonstrated that the study of teaching and learning to promote the spirituality in learning and work of nursing students consisted of four components: (1) the perspective of SLW; (2) spirit in learning and working; (3) the value of teaching and learning in practice; and (4) engagement in the nursing profession.

Teaching and learning for nursing students to have the spiritual at learning and work. A teacher or a mentor can be a good example for students while practicing nursing care on the ward. It is important to imitate nursing behaviors.

Consistent with a study by Bazrafkan et al. (2019), the key elements of being a good role model for students are clinical skills and professional practice competencies. If the teacher exerts positive behaviors, this will lead students to positively mimic good clinical practice outcomes. After clinical teaching, instructors should ask questions to encourage nursing students to reflect on their feelings toward nursing practice. This reflection would make students have awareness and goals of learning, recognizing also their own capabilities, and to listen and accept other people's opinions more. This makes it possible to use opinions/views to develop and improve themselves in nursing practice to be more efficient (Lloyd et al., 2019).

Consistent with the findings of an international study by Peters et al. (2023), it has demonstrated that to support learners in nursing practice better, instructors should have been trained in communication skills to be able to interact with nursing students and their colleagues. By doing this, instructors can increase learning opportunities and provide a more positive learning experience. The study has also found that allowing students to practice meditation and music therapy can help prepare their minds well prior to starting school and working. Similarly, a study by Poonperm et al. (2018) found that question-based teaching and learning can result in nursing students having a good level of learning behaviors in the classroom. Nursing students are also highly satisfied with this learning approach.

In line with a study by Tanantpapat et al. (2023), meditation practices with various methods while studying had a positive effect on academic achievements and cognitive skills, and reduced anxiety and stress of

meditators. In line with a study by Thammachoto et al. (2021), students with the enlightenment of mindfulness can reduce miscommunication with others; are willing to study continuously. They also have the capability to discern conscience and deal with any problems in their studying; having responsibility for assigned tasks; and making decisions with consciousness, as a result, increasing the learning efficiency of learners.

In accordance with a study by Basso et al. (2019), daily meditation reduces negative emotions; helps to have more interest in learning; has a good working memory, and anxiety decreased.

As mentioned earlier, mental preparation through meditation before the practice of nursing students will help them to feel at ease and have consciousness prior to practice. This can result in better efficiency in practice and learning like positive service behaviors towards patients. To encourage the spiritual to learn and work, a place to practice should have a positive environment in order to create a good learning atmosphere. This good circumstance can enable students to learn well.

A study by Serrano et al. (2021) found that students who received a positive environment performed better than those who received a negative environment. This counts as both academic and emotional support. This results in mutual respect and good learning interaction. Hence, educational institutions should pay attention to a positive environment like a learning placement and personnel in the department greatly. This would encourage learners to have more SLW.

In addition, creating value in practical training on the ward is something that teachers give importance to in organizing practical teaching so that students will be proud of the nursing profession and see the value of practical training on the ward.

According to a study by Poorchangizi et al. (2019) on the importance of practical values from the perspective of nursing students, nursing students who value practicing will have a high level of professionalism and will have good nursing behaviors. These behaviors include keeping the patient's confidentiality and protecting the patient's right to privacy.

In line with a study by Powell et al. (2015), ward-based practice has significant benefits for learners. These benefits involve creating value for learners at the end of the practice on the ward; making students have more confidence in their work; and having good leadership abilities.

The study also found that professional nursing commitment is an influential factor in learning and internship among nursing students. Students who are

studying at an educational institution should promote engagement in the nursing profession. This would lead to positive behaviors and inward performance (Crumley, 2020).

According to a systematic review by Sayed et al. (2019), it was found that the results of engagement in the nursing profession are what causes participation in the work; helps to fulfill a job-related state of mind that is characterized by enthusiasm, dedication, and trust (in management, organization, and co-workers).

It was also found to help reduce the mortality rate of patients in the hospital. Furthermore, a study by Slåtten et al. (2022) found that there were three outcomes of professional engagement in nursing: (1) professional nurses were positively associated with service quality; (2) job satisfaction; and (3) working atmosphere, which is very important in studying in the Faculty of Nursing. This is to prepare them to step into the nursing profession and to be able to allow professional nurses to work for a long time and continuously improve the quality of nursing care.

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## Conclusion and Recommendation

The components of teaching and learning to promote the spirituality in learning and work of nursing students consisted of 4 parts: (1) the spiritual perspective in learning and working; (2) teaching and learning to have the spirit in learning and working; (3) the value of teaching and learning in practice; and (4) engagement in the nursing profession. Study strengths: Data were elicited from three types of informants regarding the spirituality in learning and work of nursing students. This could enhance the study's credibility or rigor of the study. Study limitations: Study findings should be interpreted with caution as data are only elicited from nursing professionals. This may have limited the generalizability of the findings.

These elements will help educational institutions guide their teaching and learning to foster SLW among nursing students. These guidelines can be used to promote the working spirit of personnel in the organization. To commence with using questions that encourage students to realize their goals in life; reasons for attending the nursing science program; and their perspectives on the nursing profession. Moreover, the study's findings could be used as a criterion for defining mentoring attributes and used in the preparation of nursing instructors or nursing mentorship. The study's findings are in the Thai context. The teaching arrangement of the Bachelor

of Nursing Science Program may be different from the contexts of other countries. These findings could be applied as the foundation of teaching and learning internationally. However, the cultures and beliefs of the local contexts should be taken into account.

This will help reduce the rate of job turnover or resignation. Finally, educational institutions should emphasize the significance of SLW for nursing students and promote SLW for them. Such would benefit students and the nursing profession in the future.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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