This book addresses the use of personal experience in the training of mental health student nurses. This book follows the existential phenomenological tradition in addressing the issue of ‘madness’ and caring and adopts a historical perspective to show the antecedents of modern practices in caring. This historical perspective includes ancient Vedic, Egyptian and Greek perspectives and shows the continuity, similarity and contradictions in care from the ancient times to the present.

The book explores several themes linking history with the students’ accounts of experiences of training from 1987 to 1997. The empirical research consisted of recorded group discussions and personal, written accounts of the experience of training. Finally a philosophical approach to mental health nursing education is put forward. This comprises a critique of the concept of nursing care, an outline of the ways in which students learn from experience, and a developmental approach to reflective practice.

The existential-phenomenological approach argues for a form of caring in which a moral stance is taken. Suggestions are made for trainers to make the best use of students’ reflections on their own experience as an integral part of the course.