

# Unlocking the Language of Palpatory Experience

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"I know that  
you believe you understand  
what you think I said,  
but I'm not sure you realize  
that what you heard  
is not exactly what I meant."



Robert McCloskey  
(American author and illustrator of children's books)

## Literature on Palpation



How, what, where?

## Motion palpation Poor reliability



Love and Brodner (1987)

Mootz, Keating, Kontz, Milus and Jacobs (1989)

Panzer (1992)

## Communication Failure?



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Classroom activity End-feel

### ART of Osteopathy



(Sutherland, 1940)

## Classroom activity Students' words for ease and bind



Smooth, boggy and lots of laughter

Thought → encoding → spoken word →  
hear → decoding → interpretation.



(Hall, 1980)

## Errors in language



- Incorrect application of technique
- Ineffectiveness
- Poor assessment results

## Teaching colours

Colours = white rabbit, brown table  
 Child interprets via texture  
 = furry rabbit, smooth table  
 When tested on different items,  
 responds 'incorrectly'  
 = brown fridge (smooth),  
 white rug (furry)



## Pilot study:



The language students and educators use  
when describing palpatory experiences of  
ease & bind

Aim: explore the language used  
in learning & teaching palpation



What language is meaningful to  
students and practitioners?

## Participants



Osteopathic students, practitioners  
and teachers  
Words for "ease" and "bind"

## Findings

Many chose common words  
Also unusual words

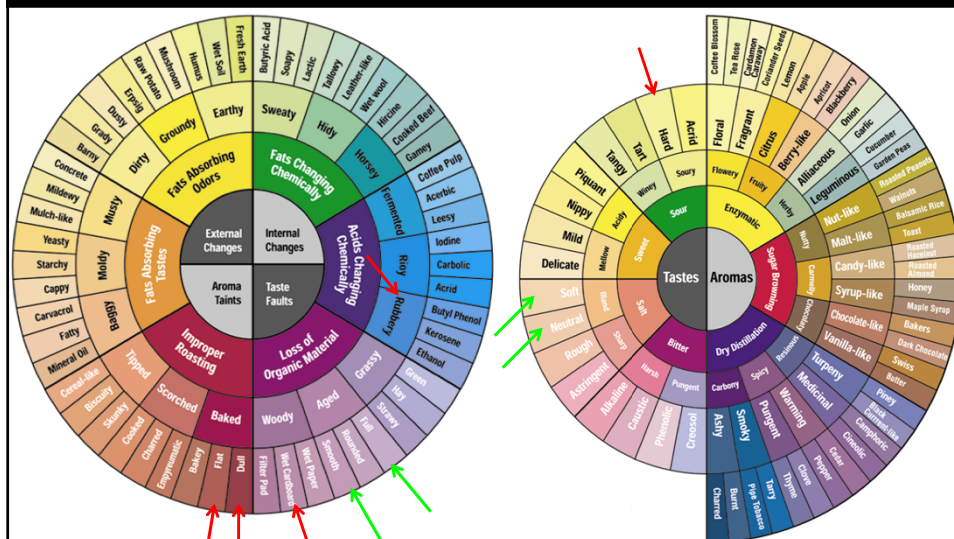
Ease = 134

Bind = 150

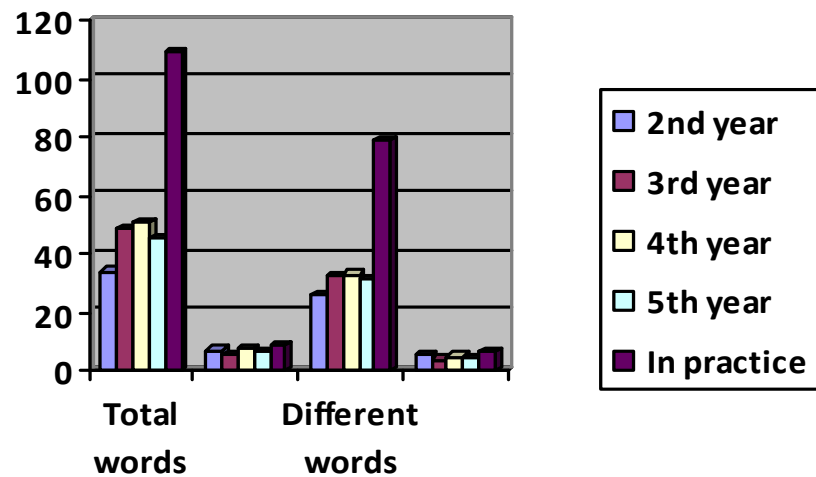
Freedom	Relaxed	Effortless
Flowing	Slack	Unrestricted
Uninhibited	Smooth	
Comfort	Soft	Midpoint
Ease	Safe to be there	Fluid
Unbound	Still	
Relaxed	Clear path	
Neutral	Open	Pliable
		Balanced
Quiet	Moving	
Potent	Elastic	Fluid
Happy	Mobile	Floating
Right	Flow	

Stiff	Fixed	Rigid
Bony locking		Hard
No freedom	Attached	
Boggy	Bound	Flat
Dull	Inelastic	Hard
Tension	Spongy	
Inhibited	Stuck	
Wet cardboard	Tension	
Congested	Contrary	
Pulling away		
Locked	Firm	Restricted
Towards barrier	Stuck	
Unhappy	Discomfort	
Less mobile		
Adhesive	Gluey	

## Parallels – Coffee Taster's Flavour Wheel



## Average numbers shift



## Practitioners > 10 years



Many additional descriptors

## Limitations

Self-selecting responders  
Interpretations of question  
Small sample size  
Students only from one university.



## Implications for teaching



Get it wrong for some  
students  
Restrict learning  
Impose on learning

## Small pilot study

Enhance student learning  
via  
improved understanding  
of teaching effectiveness.

"It is suggested that a better recognition of the problem of joining perception, intention and action may lead to a change in teaching strategies within the western manual healing arts to better integrate the work of our hands, hearts and minds".

(Comeaux , 2005)

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