

Canadian University Music Society

Proposal for a round table

Challenging 300 years of Piano Teaching Practices with 21st Century Research

Title: Music reading skills of young piano students: taxonomy of the musical codes

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Abstract: Music reading is one of the most fundamental skills a beginner pianist must acquire to achieve even a modest level of musical competence. Little is known about the early stages of music literacy development and only a few measures of music reading performance have been developed for or adapted to young music students. The primary goal of our research is to extend our understanding of how young piano students learn to read musical notation and express this information through well-controlled gestures at the keyboard. We are first carrying out an exhaustive analysis of piano method books, textbooks and other educational materials in order to extract and classify the cognitive and psychomotor components of music literacy. Such an analysis is needed because these components are often introduced implicitly, rather than explicitly, in piano method books (e.g., through the selection of pieces to be mastered). The result of this analysis will take the form of a systematic taxonomy whereby these components are organized hierarchically with a clear specification of their level of class-inclusion and complexity. The resulting taxonomy (and associated graphic and narrative descriptions) is providing a comprehensive description of the skills involved in music reading, from the simplest to the most complex, and, thereby, ensure that the entire domain of music reading is adequately covered. It underscores the components and the variables that must be considered in order to understand what young piano students must learn to master musical notation and express this information through well-controlled gestures at the keyboard.