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## Media Releases and Announcements

### Illustrations in piano books aren't all that jazz when it comes to learning

**OTTAWA, March 25, 2015** — Illustrations can be helpful learning aids; they can enhance understanding or create context, and certainly can make the process more interesting. However, this is not always the case, especially when learning the complex art of reading music. A study by Professor Gilles Comeau of the School of Music concluded that decorative illustrations in children's piano books can actually hinder learning because they distract the reader.

Comeau and his team designed an experiment using an apparatus in which three miniature cameras were mounted on a padded headband to track and record eye movements. They observed young piano students' eye movements while reading piano pieces taken from popular method books containing illustrations. The eye-tracking technology allowed the researchers to evaluate how much time the participants spent looking at the illustrations.

They determined that the decorative pictures were distracting the participants from the musical notation. Their data showed that the participants' eyes were at times drawn to the illustrations and away from the music. "This is a clear indication that students are dividing their attention between processing the musical signs and processing the various colourful illustrations," explained Professor Comeau, who is also the director of the Piano Pedagogy Research Laboratory at the University of Ottawa.

The purpose of this study was to gauge the instructional value of these illustrations and question whether they affect the ability to read music. "Learning to read music is a complex activity that requires time and effort in the early stages. The student has to process an abundance of new visual information that needs to be decoded and transferred into proper physical gestures." This study would suggest that processing unnecessary information, such as illustrations, could actually be detrimental to learning to read music.

"With such results, one must seriously question whether the presence of illustrations serves to call the child's attention away from the printed score," concluded Professor Comeau.

An article by Professor Comeau, in which he describes the results of this study, was published in the *Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) e-Journal* and was recently crowned the journal's article of the year for 2015.

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