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THE KEY TO BETTER LEARNING



If there were an award for the coolest lab on campus, uOttawa's [Piano Pedagogy Research Laboratory](#) of the [Faculty of Arts](#) would be a top contender. In 2005, the student lounge on the second floor of Perez Hall was renovated and became a home for ingenious cutting-edge music technology. The lab's design and use of colour, abundant natural light and whimsical artistic touches give the place a Zen-like calm. The centerpiece of the lab is two side-by-side grand pianos, surrounded by video cameras, LCD screens, sensor technology and human-digital interfaces that can track a player's muscle tension, posture and eye movement as well as provide graphic displays of what a pianist is doing.

The lab's creator and director, Professor Gilles Comeau, and his interdisciplinary research teams have earned a formidable international reputation for the one-of-a-kind lab as a result of the discoveries that have sprung from trying to answer the question, "How does piano learning actually happen?"

This, of course, has led to as many questions: "Why do more than half of all piano students quit before they master the instrument? What motivates pianists to excel? What's the best way to learn how to read music when starting to play the piano? How can pianists avoid physical injuries and manage performance anxiety? What makes a child prodigy? Does parental involvement help or hinder student learning?"

For Gilles Comeau, the inspiration to move forward into the lab's second decade comes from watching undergraduate and graduate students' eyes lighting up when the lab's scientific inquiries begin to reveal answers. "They never thought about what sensors could do, or what this curve means. The students share their fascination and join my world to become researchers in pedagogy. That's what is most rewarding."