Music Reading and Beginner Piano Students: An examination of piano teaching resources, music reading teaching strategies and piano teacher perceptions

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Abstract

Throughout my piano teaching career of more than twenty-five years, I have taught hundreds of young beginners to read music. Music reading, defined as the process of decoding the symbols of staff notation through the use of a musical instrument (Gudmundsdottir, 2010), is a fundamental skill for pianists; yet achieving a high level of proficiency remains elusive for many students. For young beginners, the development of music reading skills is a central focus of instruction. Both novice and experienced teachers rely heavily on beginner piano method books as their primary resource for teaching music reading, and many consult piano pedagogy texts for additional strategies. However, limited research has examined the effectiveness of these materials. This gap is concerning, given that strong music reading skills enable students to learn new repertoire more efficiently, support the development of sight reading ability, and facilitate collaborative music-making (Fourie, 2004; Zhukov, 2014).

Through the lens of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), this mixed-methods research project examines beginner piano music reading across three interconnected contexts. First, it includes an analysis of beginner piano method books to identify the music reading concepts and strategies they present. Second, it explores piano teachers' perceptions of beginner music reading instruction in order to determine which strategies are most commonly employed in practice. Third, it investigates whether, and in what ways, Communities of Practice; groups of people who share a common practice and interact on a regular basis to share knowledge (Wenger, 2006), support teachers in their work with beginner music reading instruction.

To address these inquiries, I review relevant studies and piano pedagogy textbooks to catalogue established music reading strategies; survey more than 200 teachers to gather insights on method book use and sight reading practices; conduct four focus groups to uncover common instructional approaches; and facilitate two additional focus groups with Music for Young Children® to determine how Communities of Musical Practice (CoMP) contribute to professional support in the area of music reading.

The study demonstrates that existing music reading resources, namely beginner piano method books and piano pedagogy textbooks, are insufficient in providing comprehensive and pedagogically sound strategies for teaching beginner students. The literature strongly supports beginning music reading instruction with a sound before sign approach and reinforcing reading development through aural and rhythmic activities, improvisation, composition, and transposition. Yet these elements are inconsistently represented, and in many cases entirely absent, from current instructional materials. Survey findings indicate that while teachers are generally satisfied with beginner method books, they readily acknowledge their limitations and frequently rely on supplementary materials to address gaps. Focus group discussions further reveal that teachers employ a wide range of strategies and resources to meet individual student needs, most often using method books grounded in an eclectic reading approach. The CoMP focus groups highlight the substantial personal and professional benefits of participating in collaborative learning communities. Teachers reported that CoMP involvement enhances their pedagogical creativity, expands their repertoire of music reading strategies, and provides essential emotional and instructional support. Collectively, these findings point to a clear need

for improved, research-aligned instructional materials and underscore the value of CoMP in strengthening music reading pedagogy for beginner piano students.

Music reading instruction for young beginners can be significantly strengthened through the integration of research supported teaching strategies into instructional materials. The field of piano pedagogy must advocate for approaches that align with current music reading research and ensure that these strategies are embedded directly within music reading resources. In parallel, the profession should promote the CoMP framework as a means of supporting independent piano teachers, many of whom work in isolation and benefit greatly from collaborative learning environments. Strengthening both pedagogical resources and professional networks is essential for improving the quality and effectiveness of music reading instruction in early piano education.

Keywords: Music reading, beginner piano, beginner piano method books, sight reading, music reading teaching strategies, piano pedagogy, communities of musical practice, communities of practice, Music for Young Children®.

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Chapter 1:
Introduction

An expert at anything was once a beginner.
Rutherford B. Hayes

With more than twenty-five years of piano teaching experience, I can say without exaggeration that I have taught hundreds of children to read music. I can also attest to the difficulties young students face in the pursuit of proficient music reading skills. For the teacher, music reading instruction with young children requires planning, creativity and most of all, persistence. By far, the beginner piano method book, which offers sequenced, progressive units of study introducing the student to the many facets of music reading, remains the most common resource used to teach music reading to young beginner piano students. The proper selection of a beginner piano method book therefore plays an important role in the overall success of a new student in relation to music reading. For the purposes of this dissertation, a beginner piano method book is defined as a pedagogical text that provides a progressive curriculum designed to guide students through the various concepts involved in learning to play the piano and read music. A problem arises however, with method books employing various music reading approaches such as middle C (i.e. *Leila Fletcher*), multi-key (i.e. *Bastien Piano Basics*), intervallic (i.e. *The Music Tree*), and eclectic, which uses the above approaches in combination (i.e. *Piano Adventures*). In this study, these texts are considered "notation-first" methods whereby students learn to decode written notation and symbols from the very first lessons and playing ability is developed through music reading. Some also advocate for the "sound before sign" approach which promotes the development of the ear prior to the introduction of musical notation. This

approach is exemplified by *The Suzuki Method* and *Music Moves for Piano* which focus on exploring music first through sound, audiation, rote playing, and ear training, and the introduction of notation is delayed. With so many methods available, how does a teacher decide which approach will generate reliable reading skills? Which beginner piano method books offer support for the development of music reading? Which teaching strategies are effective to develop proficient music reading with young students? As a teacher committed to ensuring that my students become musically literate, I have read and pondered upon these questions for many years, which has ultimately led me here, to this study. Research in beginner music reading remains limited. A disparity exists between how teachers teach music reading and the information found in piano pedagogy texts, scholarly studies, and how music reading is presented in beginner piano method books. I undertake this study to examine music reading teaching resources, as well as to identify common music reading teaching strategies and to better understand teacher perceptions of music reading instruction.

Musical literacy, a foundational skill critical for a piano student's long-term development and engagement with diverse repertoire, also enables participation in a wide array of musical endeavours. The *International Kodaly Society* defines musical literacy as "the ability to read and write musical notation and to read notation at sight without the aid of an instrument" (www.iks.hu). I would add to this definition that musical literacy also encompasses a basic knowledge of theory and musical structure. Although an individual does not require musical literacy to engage in music-making, it allows a musician to fully and easily participate in musical pursuits such as performing, improvising, composing, and teaching. This study concerns itself with music reading, the process of decoding the symbols of staff notation using a musical

instrument (Gudmundsdottir, 2010a). In the context of this dissertation, music reading refers to the act of reading and understanding a written musical score while playing the piano. To be sure, proficient music reading ability has many benefits which include the ability to learn new pieces easily, participate in collaborative music making, explore music from many genres, expand knowledge of piano repertoire, play music for enjoyment, and can facilitate work as a pianist (Hardy, 1992; Wristen, 2005; Chronister, 2005; Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996). Music reading ability is not only valued by piano teachers but also by Canadian music conservatories (i.e. Conservatory Canada and The Royal Conservatory of Music) whose evaluations for conservatory practical exams includes sight reading, the ability to play a piece of music without prior practice (Kopiez and Lee, 2006). Although music reading and sight reading are related, (both require the decoding of musical notation and symbols), sight reading is a specific music reading task where students perform a piece of music at first sight without rehearsal. One might argue that all music reading is, in some sense, performed "by sight," since students often engage with new pieces initially through sight reading. Therefore, it is important to understand the intent behind the music reading task. For this study, music reading refers to ongoing engagement with notation and musical scores which includes review and practice. Sight reading refers to the task of playing a piece at first sight with no prior practice and limited review. Indeed, both music reading and sight reading ability are important and offer students valuable experiences in music, even young beginner pianists.

Average beginner piano students (ages six to nine) can find the task of learning to read music frustrating. Hence, music reading acquisition during the first year of piano lessons consists of progressive weekly review and reinforcement of numerous music reading concepts which

include, but are not limited to, pre-notation directional reading, the grand staff, differentiation between line and space notes, recognizing steps and skips, rhythms and note values. At this rudimentary level, developing accurate and fluent reading ability creates a challenge. Students must identify individual notes on the staff for each treble and bass clef, the rhythmic content assigned to each note (i.e., quarter or half note), the keys on the keyboard in relation to the notes on the staff and master the coordination of the physical movements required to play a note in the correct location with accurate rhythm, articulation (i.e., short or accented) or dynamic (how loud or soft to depress the key). To facilitate the music reading process, teachers employ many strategies to assist new students which generally consist of the use of flashcards, worksheets, mnemonic devices, and games to review and reinforce music concepts. They also seek guidance from colleagues or consult piano pedagogy textbooks, both of which serve as important resources for independent piano teachers.

When I embarked on my teaching career over twenty-five years ago, I was overwhelmed by the many facets of running my own business as an independent piano teacher. To lessen the gap between known and unknown, I took charge of my own professional development, read pedagogical texts, and attended many workshops and conferences. When gaps in my knowledge remained, I turned to my colleagues for their guidance and expertise. I am sure many piano teachers can relate to this ad hoc training model upon entering the business of independent piano teaching. Surprisingly, no standardized education for piano teachers in Canada exists even though piano teachers have taught in some form for over 200 years. Indeed, the piano teaching profession has endured a tradition of informality with no expectation of higher education, and the occupation was perceived traditionally more as a hobby rather than a vocation. Not until

recent years has piano teaching been considered a serious career option with the field encouraging higher education and pedagogy training; yet currently no mandatory educational requirements have been set in order to teach piano. Piano pedagogy texts devote many pages to topics related to running a piano studio from business aspects to pedagogical issues. However, as discussed in this study, many texts omit the topic of music reading or are deficient in including music reading teaching strategies.

When speaking with colleagues, the topics of teaching beginners, music reading and beginner piano method books continually emerge as points of conversation. This results from mainly three factors: (1) beginner piano students often fill a large portion of a teacher's studio, (2) music reading serves as a main focus in beginner lessons, and (3) the beginner piano method book remains the main teaching tool. Piano teachers benefit greatly from participating in discourse among one another. In my experience, whenever I engage with a group of piano teachers the conversation inevitably drifts towards our shared practice. The outcome of these discussions typically yields many creative teaching ideas and new perspectives. Participation in group settings like this offer a viable space for learning to take place especially when they operate as a Community of Practice (CoP). A CoP consists of groups of people who share a common practice, such as piano teaching, who interact on a regular basis to share and learn together to improve upon their practice (Wenger 2006). A CoP setting provides an ideal forum for piano teachers new and experienced to tackle issues related to running an independent music studio and to improve upon their teaching techniques and music reading instruction. I was fortunate to teach the Music for Young Children® (MYC®) program for twenty-five years. This group piano program includes weekly one-hour lessons for beginner students (ages three to

nine) accompanied by their parents. Upon completion of MYC® training, new teachers are assigned to a "nest", a group of other MYC® teachers local to one's teaching location. The nest connects new teachers with other MYC® teachers who have varying levels of experience and provides an MYC® community to which teachers may turn for guidance and assistance. Through my local nest, I gained substantial knowledge and developed increased confidence in teaching the program, as well as in my general teaching practice. As a novice teacher at the time, the encouragement and guidance I received were invaluable. This Community of Musical Practice (CoMP) enabled me to hone my teaching skills, cultivate professional friendships, and acquire effective teaching strategies, particularly in the area of music reading concepts. Independent piano teachers can certainly profit from this type of collaborative learning environment. This study employs the theoretical framework of CoP to explore how CoMP emerge as a space for teachers to share knowledge and resources about beginner method books and music reading. This social learning framework, already prevalent in many fields, provides a viable avenue for teachers to gather valuable information and deserves attention in the realm of piano pedagogy. Learning and construction of knowledge through social interactions also appear in prominent learning theories in the field of education. The theory of social constructivism put forth by psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) emphasizes the collaborative nature of learning. This theory posits that "knowledge is first constructed in a social context and is then internalized and used by individuals" (Amineh et al. 2015). Therefore, learning unfolds as an interactive process where cognitive growth, understanding, and formation of beliefs occur with cooperation from other individuals. The piano lesson serves as a classic example of social constructivism where the co-construction of musical meaning unfolds through scaffolding, dialogue and feedback through

interactions between teacher and student. From a personal and pedagogical perspective, this theoretical framework informs my teaching and research.

Since music reading and beginner method books factor prominently in piano teaching, one would assume that there are numerous studies investigating music reading acquisition and music reading in piano method books, but this is not the case. An investigation involving the presentation of music reading concepts in beginner piano method books is needed to determine how they align with existing scientific literature for the improvement of these essential teaching resources. Considering that teachers consult piano pedagogy textbooks, an examination of their music reading content and how they align with scientific literature will improve these commonly referenced texts. Given that teachers seek advice and guidance from colleagues, especially concerning method books and music reading, an exploration of CoMP and its potential benefits for independent piano teachers would be an asset to the field of piano pedagogy research. Drawing on the issues highlighted above, the study focuses on the following three research questions:

1. To what extent are music reading strategies and concepts identified in the scholarly literature and pedagogical texts present in beginner piano method books?

2. What are teachers' perceptions of music reading instruction and how do they navigate the different resources and approaches?

3. In what ways do teachers, who are members of a Music for Young Children® (MYC®) Community of Practice, engage with each other about teaching music reading?

Within the social constructivism theoretical framework, I adopt a mixed-methods approach that includes qualitative and quantitative data. For the qualitative component of this study, I review expert literature on sight reading and piano pedagogy textbooks to identify music reading concepts and teaching strategies. I also analyze the presentation of music reading concepts in

beginner piano method books. In addition, I run four focus groups with piano teachers to explore approaches to music reading instruction with beginner students. Two of the four focus groups further examine teachers' participation in a Music for Young Children® CoMP to determine how this social learning framework supports teachers professionally and with music reading instruction. For the quantitative component, I collect data through a survey investigating teachers' perceptions of music reading and their use of piano method books. Furthermore, I systematically analyze selected music reading concepts as presented in piano method books.

Dissertation Overview

The dissertation is comprised of six chapters. The first chapter, the introduction, informs the reader about the problem and outlines the dissertation. The second chapter, the literature review, surveys scholarly sources related to music reading, piano pedagogy, and Communities of Practice. First, I present a brief history of piano method books, reading approaches, and piano pedagogy, to situate the reader in a historical context of the project which will allow for a deeper connection to present day instructional practices. An overview of scholarly studies on teaching music reading, music reading in beginner piano method books, young pianists and music reading, sight reading, and Communities of Practice follows. The third chapter, methodology, describes in detail the methods and frameworks for each component of the study. It contains the following sections: the research design, development of the analytical tool, selection of beginner piano method books, survey of music teachers, administration of the survey, analysis of the survey, focus groups, analysis of transcripts, and theoretical frameworks. The fourth chapter, research findings, interprets the data as qualitative narratives and quantitative tables. This section provides results from the reviews of music reading studies and piano pedagogy textbooks for

music reading concepts and strategies, the analysis of the beginner piano method books, the piano teacher survey, the piano teacher focus groups and the MYC® CoMP focus groups. The fifth chapter, discussion of the research questions, synthesizes the data to present the outcomes of this study and their implication for the piano teaching profession. The examination of the first research question highlights the deficiencies of beginner piano method books and piano pedagogy textbooks and also identifies ways on how these main teaching resources can be improved to align with scholarly research. The discussion of the second research question involves music reading teaching strategies employed by independent piano teachers, while the final research question explains how CoMP support teachers personally, professionally and with music reading instruction. The last chapter offers a synthesis of the project by: (1) highlighting areas of improvement for music reading concepts in beginner piano method books, (2) providing insights into teachers' perceptions and teaching strategies of music reading for beginner students, (3) demonstrating how CoMP support teachers in music reading instruction, and (4) identifying useful strategies for teaching beginner music reading. Lastly, the dissertation concludes with a personal reflection about my teaching experiences and describes the creation of a CoMP in Niagara Falls for local piano teachers and the creation of an aural skills workbook for beginner students which emerged as a result of this project.

Chapter 2:
Review of Literature

Music ability is not an inborn talent but an ability which can be developed.
Shinichi Suzuki

This review of literature examines music reading as presented in pedagogical and scientific literature. It draws primarily on reading approaches and beginner method books often used to teach music reading during the first years of piano lessons as well as Communities of Musical Practice (CoMP) since many independent piano teachers acquire teaching knowledge through consulting with colleagues. Scientific studies remain limited in these areas; for this reason, I have included related research areas to broaden the context of the problem. Firstly, I present an historical overview of piano method books, music reading approaches, and piano pedagogy. A summary of studies concerned with teaching music reading, scientific studies on music reading in piano method books, studies on young pianists and music reading, and studies on expert sight reading follows. Lastly, I provide an overview of CoP and studies related to CoMP.

2.1 History of Piano Method Books

Almost as soon as keyboard instruments were invented in Western Europe, instructional methods dispensing advice on how to play them were created. As early as the 16th century, musician-monks discussed various aspects of organ, harpsichord, and clavichord playing such as performance issues, creativity, music theory, composition, and improvisation (Arshinova, 2022). The Franciscan monk Juan Bermudo (1510-1565) wrote *Declaración de instrumentos musicales*, (1555), one of the first treatises to deal with practical, beginner aspects of keyboard playing (Arshinova, 2022). This book discusses rudimentary issues of keyboard performance, such as

sitting position, correct fingering and hand position. This led to works written by prominent harpsichord performers focused on technical aspects of harpsichord performance. *The Art of Playing the Harpsichord* (1716) by François Couperin (1668-1733) and *The Method of the Finger Technique* by Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764) stand out as two examples of influential methods which touched on topics such as sitting and hand position, fingering, decoding melismas, and technique (Arshinova, 2022).

Toward the end of the 17th century, the Italian instrument maker Bartolomeo Cristofori (1655-1731) invented the pianoforte, which he perfected by the 1730s (Rowland, 1998). The pianoforte quickly became the favoured instrument of the 18th century because of its possibility of greater dynamic contrasts (previous keyboard instruments lacked the ability to significantly change volume); music written specifically for the pianoforte flourished along with piano methods. C. P. E. Bach's (1714-1788), *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* (1753, 1762) remains one of the most influential piano methods of the 1700s. This method, published in two parts, offers the reader an extensive and comprehensive instruction on fingering, technique, theory and improvisation. Although Bach specifically mentions the clavichord, harpsichord, and organ, the great composer-pianists of Western art music referred to this book and used it extensively (Mendel, 1949). Piano methods were abundant during the 19th century, however most focused on the technical aspect of pianoforte playing. Many composer-pianists published piano methods that were merely books of technical exercises promoted to improve facility at the instrument (Ponce, 2022). However, the *Introduction to the Art of Playing the Pianoforte* (1801) by Muzio Clementi (1752-1832) stands out as a method that resembles the modern piano methods that exist today. This method begins with the elements of music

notation, rhythm and theory, but quickly progresses to advanced performance ideas on fingering, articulation, and ornamentation; it then provides many short musical pieces or "lessons" for the student to practice. Most piano methods that were published during the 18th and 19th centuries were written with an accomplished adult pianist in mind since these books provided exercises or instruction for proficient pianists. It is not until the 20th century that pedagogues developed reading approaches, along with beginner piano method books, which provided progressive lessons for new pianists, especially young children.

2.2 History of Reading Approaches

Today one can find a considerable amount of beginner method books utilizing four main reading approaches: middle C, multi-key, intervallic and eclectic (a combination of the reading approaches). The sound before sign approach, where students acquire technical skills and repertoire aurally before being introduced to music notation, contrasts the notation-first approaches and is underrepresented in the beginner method book market. A survey of early piano method books confirms the middle C approach, which has its roots in the early 20th century, as the oldest of the reading approaches. *Melody Book* (1916) by Dorothy Gaynor Blake and *First Solo Book* (1918) by Angela Diller and Elizabeth Quaile provide examples of the first North American published beginner method books utilizing the middle C approach (Uzler et al., 1991). The 1920s and 1930s saw the appearance of method books which included illustrations linking the notes on the staff to the keyboard and teaching instructions (Uzler et al., 1991). The method *Teaching Little Fingers to Play* (1936) by John Thompson (Bastien, 1995), still in print today, popularized this approach. With this reading approach, a student begins by placing both thumbs on middle C and is exposed to notation and rhythm simultaneously from the first piece

(Bastien, 1995). Students learn subsequent notes one at a time and visually memorize their placement on the staff (Jacobson, 2015). These methods generously supply finger numbers and limit the keys of the pieces to C, G and F major (Bastien, 1995). Figure 1.1 reproduces an example of a piece using the middle C approach. The excerpt "By the Sea" from *Leila Fletcher Piano Course Book 1* shows a simple melody shared between the right and left hands in mainly stepwise motion. Each hand begins with the thumb on middle C, the typical hand position for the middle C approach.

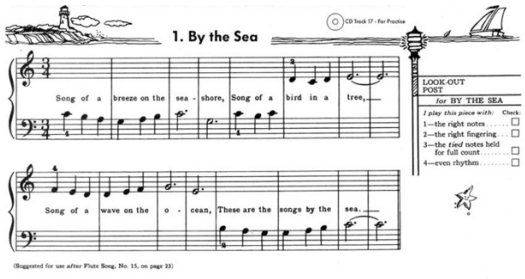

Fig.1.1: "By the Sea" from Leila Fletcher Piano Course Book 1, (Fletcher, 2012).
Used by Permission from Mayfair Music.

The multi-key approach, developed by Robert Pace (1924-2010) in response to the middle C approach, was widely used by the mid-20th century. *Music for Piano* by Robert Pace published in 1954, teaches students five-finger patterns in all major and minor keys, presents pieces in all keys and allows students to play the entire keyboard (Jacobson, 2015). This reading approach typically incorporates more music reading concepts compared to its counterparts by including more rhythm values, dynamic signs and articulation. Inspired by Robert Pace, James Bastien and Jane Smisor Bastien popularized this approach with their piano method series, Bastien Piano Methods (1985), which utilizes a gradual multi-key approach. The multi-key approach is illustrated by the excerpt below, "*Icing the Cake"* from *Piano Town Primer Level* by

Diane Hidy and Keith Snell (see Fig. 1.2). The right hand uses notes of the middle C five-finger position while the left hand is in bass C five-finger position.

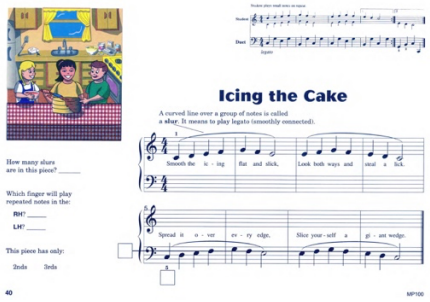

Fig.1.2: "Icing the Cake" from Piano Town Primer Level, (Hidy and Snell, 2004).
Used by Permission from Neil A. Kjos Music Company.

Frances Clark (1905-1998) developed the intervallic approach contemporaneously with the multi-key approach most notably through her method *Time to Begin* (later published as *The Music Tree* series) in 1955. This approach usually begins with pre-staff notation or partial-staff notation where students first experience reading notation by contour or direction and notes are grouped by patterns "so students can see the spatial relationships" (Jacobson, 2015, p. 37). Figure 1.3 reproduces an example of pre-staff notation from the current version *of The Music Tree: A Time to Begin*. As demonstrated by the pre-staff composition *Take Off*, staff lines, bar lines, clef and time signatures are absent. The right hand is represented by notes with the stems up and the left hand by stems down.

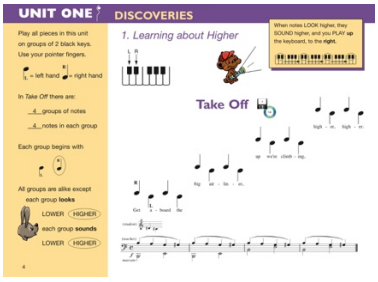

Fig.1.3: An example of pre-staff notation "Take Off" from The Music Tree, Time to Begin, (Clark, 2000).
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Intervallic reading begins with landmarks or guide notes such as bass clef F, middle C, and treble clef G; then students read intervals up and down from these landmarks (Bastien, 1995). The purely intervallic approach has given way in recent years to the eclectic approach (although still sometimes referred to as intervallic) which uses elements of all three reading approaches. Eclectic methods begin with pre-staff reading on the black and white keys followed by the introduction of landmark notes. Next, staff notes are added one interval at a time starting from middle C position. After all notes of C position are presented, the next set of pieces moves into another position.

The final approach, sound before sign, proposes that music should be presented to beginners in the same way that they experience language learning, through sound first then the representative signs. Current teaching practices generally introduce musical notation from the very first lesson, however proponents of the sound before sign approach argue that children should experience music through listening, moving, singing and playing before introducing notation or theoretical symbols used (McPherson & Gabrielsson, 2002, p.1). Indeed, for much of its history, music teaching was largely an aural tradition where beginners learned technique and repertoire by ear, while instruction focused on improvisation and composition. However, music was reduced to a reproductive art by the end of the 19th century because of the proliferation of printed music material such as cheap mass produced scores and books of exercises (McPherson & Gabrielsson, 2002). McPherson & Gabrielsson also remark that many influential pedagogues throughout history have promoted the sound before sign approach such as Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827), one of the first educators to bring the idea that children should experience concepts through direct experience before the introduction of symbols; others include James

Mainwaring (1887-1952) who believed that music students should be able to "think in sound," and Edwin Gordon (1927-2015) the originator of Music Learning Theory which emphasizes the development of audiation skills before the presentation of musical notation. Shinichi Suzuki (1898-1998) created the Suzuki Method or the Mother Tongue Method, which models music learning "after the process of language learning-first listening, then using the language by means of repetitive copying, and only then learning to read and write the language by means of graphic symbols" (Uzler et al., 1991, p. 82). The main focus for the sound before sign argument is the idea that sensory and motor experiences should precede the learning of symbols. Sloboda argues:

> No one would consider teaching a normal child to read while he was at a very early stage of learning spoken language. Yet it seems the norm to start children off on reading at the very first instrumental lesson without establishing the level of musical awareness already present. (Sloboda, 1978, p. 15).

The thought that children will struggle with note reading and not develop reading fluency remains a common criticism of the sound before sign approach. However, research in music reading shows that strong ear skills correlate with successful sight reading. Another criticism of this approach lies in the lack of systematic, progressive methods. Although currently available, *The Suzuki Method* and *Music Moves for Piano* (based on music learning theory) require teachers to invest in training before using these methods. Also, teachers taught with a notation-first approach may be reluctant to change to a sound before sign approach or be uncertain about how to teach the approach without guiding materials. Current pedagogy favours the intervallic and ecelctic approaches as seen in piano pedagogy texts and by expert teachers who promote music reading by direction and pattern and the use of beginner piano method books.

2.3 History of Piano Pedagogy

For many teachers piano pedagogy textbooks, books which include a comprehensive overview of all aspects of piano teaching, can be the primary source of information regarding music reading instruction. These books provide valuable guidance on a diverse range of teaching issues and are featured extensively in university piano pedagogy programs and in preparation for piano pedagogy conservatory diplomas. Many teachers, regardless of educational level, rely on these books for expert advice and practical ideas regarding pedagogy, business practices, creative teaching ideas, and practical performance information.

The Oxford dictionary defines pedagogy as the method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept. Crappell (2019) also adds it often refers to topics related to teaching of children, can be used in very specific terms (like andragogy, the study of adult learning), and encompasses ways related to teacher training and scientific inquiry regarding teaching. Pedagogy, in the modern sense, can trace its origins to the Enlightenment with the ideas of philosopher-composer Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and especially with the theories of Swiss pedagogue Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827). Pestalozzi rejected the trend of brutal discipline in education which was pervasive in the eighteenth century and instead promoted the view that education should be an enjoyable process where children develop naturally and wholistically (Mueller, 1995). He espoused the ideas of specialized teacher training, education which moved away from memorizing facts to one which was based on observation, experimentation, reasoning, and the moral development of children through music (Mueller, 1995). Pestalozzian influences can be seen throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

with the formalization of pedagogical training and inquiry in institutions of higher learning (Crappell, 2019).

Piano pedagogy as a separate domain emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century due to several factors: the growing popularity of amateur piano playing, the admiration of virtuoso piano performers and concertizing, the rise of the middle class which increased the demand in piano manufacturing, publication of printed piano music and piano method books, and the creation of music conservatories (Crappell, 2019). Music conservatories of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries greatly influenced the development of piano pedagogy. Many of the leading pianists and composers of the day taught in these institutions. The most significant of these was the first public school of music, the Conservatoire national de musique et d'art dramatique, founded in Paris, France in 1795. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Paris Conservatory served as the model for the establishment of music conservatories in Europe and North America including the prominent Conservatory of Music in Leipzig founded by Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy in 1843. Many current music conservatory curricula still follow the models of these two conservatories. Piano teaching as a profession flourished in the nineteenth century and with that the need for teacher training. In North America, European pedagogues such as Ludwig Deppe, Rudolph Breithaupt, Theodor Leschetizky, and Tobias Matthay significantly shaped piano pedagogy. These pedagogues "influenced early twentieth century American pedagogical thought through their writings and the writings of their American students. These teachers were pioneers of a new era of piano pedagogy" (James, 1994, p. 32). The creation of musical organizations such as the Music Teachers National Association (USA, 1876), The Royal Conservatory of Music (Canada, 1886), the

Western Ontario Conservatory of Music (Canada, 1891), the American College of Musicians (USA, 1929), and the Canadian Federation of Music Teachers' Association (Canada, 1935) also promoted teacher training and education. The class piano movement, group piano instruction prevalent in public schools during the 1920s through to the early 1940s, also led to the development of teacher training and teacher instruction materials. An analysis of these classes shows that "many of the issues presently discussed in the piano pedagogy world evolved from changes implemented by the movement or were generated by it" (Montandon, 1998, p. 35). Montandon remarks that criticism of class piano instruction encouraged new pedagogical thought which influenced prominent twentieth-century pedagogues such as Raymond Burrows, Robert Pace, Frances Clark, and Guy Duckworth. These early-twentieth century leaders in the field of piano pedagogy created new methods for piano teaching including original approaches to music reading, utilization of technology, and modern insights related to teaching and learning processes (Montandon, 1998). In Canada during the early-twentieth century, several important pedagogues created piano teaching materials, such as Kate Chittenden (*The Synthetic Method for the Pianoforte*, published sometime before 1923), Kelly Kirby (*Kelly Kirby Kindergarten Method*, 1936), Boris Berlin (*The ABC of Piano Playing*, 1941), and Leila Fletcher (*The Leila Fletcher Piano Course*, 1950). Piano instruction in Toronto public schools was introduced in the form of group piano classes by Hope Kammerer in 1926. This initiative gained traction throughout the country and existed in some form in various school systems until the early 21st century. From the mid-twentieth century to the present day, piano pedagogy has evolved to include sophisticated ideas from many disciplines such as biomechanics, neuroscience, developmental psychology, and education. Degrees in piano pedagogy and piano performance

can be found in universities along with journals and publications with piano-specific content such as *The Piano Magazine* published by the Frances Clark Center. In 2004, Dr. Gilles Comeau founded the first piano pedagogy research laboratory at the University of Ottawa which is committed to investigating issues related to piano teaching and learning. In recent years piano pedagogy has shifted to address the needs of students who have exceptionalities and to adapt piano teaching curricula to suit a student's individual needs, background and personal interest. Despite its legitimization and proven value, piano pedagogy education remains optional for piano teachers. This persists due to the perception that performance training (years of piano lessons) is adequate preparation for piano teaching (Crappell, 2019). There is also a notable absence of certification for establishing a piano teaching business, a deficiency that would, if addressed, greatly benefit independent piano teachers.

2.4 Studies on Teaching Music Reading

In general, studies concerning teaching music reading are sparse and none seem to centre on teaching music reading to young beginner piano students. The studies which do exist on music reading primarily focus on classroom teaching with band instruments or singing. These studies discuss how to improve the instructional methods for music reading in schools of which many of the authors found the current methods to be substandard. Hewson (1966) argues that "teachers of music reading are not satisfied with the objectives attained in their field, nor can they decide which instructional method would ultimately be most successful. In spite of the multiplicity of approaches to the basic teaching concepts, there is actually not a wide variety of methods" (p.289). This statement remains true today and applies to the field of piano teaching. Studies on teaching music reading highlight the inadequacies of current teaching methods such as the lack

of certain elements like aural training and kinesthetic activities which have been shown to improve music reading ability.

In order to improve music reading instruction Hewson (1966) devised a new instructional program based on the idea that children learn better from experience than from explanation. The new program established a functional, conceptual way of reading music rather than using theoretical knowledge but also provided a foundation for future theoretical knowledge. The experiment used the following formula: play by ear, see or identify in notation, then read the new phrases along with previous material. The experimental method also included an approach to learning notational skills where tonality and key signatures were comprehended aurally, by imitation, and by identification. Three classes of intermediate students received instruction through conventional methods, while another three classes engaged in the experimental approach. Thirty-eight teachers listened to tape recordings of the participants and rated the sight reading ability of each of the groups. Ninety-three percent of the evaluators rated the experimental groups above the conventional groups in sight reading and functional reading abilities. Although this study dates back several years, it stands out as a rare example of an experimental method for teaching music reading highlighting aural training as an avenue to assist in the development of reading skills.

Grutzmacher (1987) conducted a study which investigated the relationship of tonal pattern instruction using harmonization and vocalization to tonal concept development and performance achievement of beginning instrumentalists. The study compared two approaches; the first emphasized the use of specific tonal patterns taught through techniques of vocalization and harmonization while the other traditional approach emphasized technical skill and

development with content consisting of musical symbols and music notes taught from notation. Grutzmacher asserts that most method books follow a traditional note-identification approach with notes presented one at a time in isolation as opposed to the tonal pattern approach. Instead, she argues that instrumental music students must first be guided in conceiving sound through the ear. Forty-eight fifth and sixth-grade students were randomly assigned to one of the two groups and received one 30-minute group lesson per week for fourteen weeks. To measure the sight reading skills and tonal pattern recognition of the participants, Grutzmacher used the following tests: *Iowa Tests of Musical Literacy Level 2, Tonal Aural Perception Test, Tonal Reading Recognition Test,* and the *Melodic Sight Reading Achievement Test*. The results showed that the tonal pattern group of students improved in melodic sight reading skills over those in the traditional approach. Also, the tonal pattern group had a higher level of understanding of major and minor tonalities through listening, singing, and playing than the traditional group who experienced major and minor tonalities using definitions and descriptors. Using the *Iowa Tests of Musical Literacy Level 2* and the *Melodic Sight Reading Achievement Test* as measuring tools, the experimental group displayed slightly higher scores in sight reading skills than the traditional group, however, no significant difference was found between the two groups in reading recognition. This contrasts with the previous study which showed a larger divergence in reading abilities with those given an aural training approach over the traditional notational approach.

In a related study, Kendall (1988) investigated two teaching approaches with beginning instrumentalists: (1) the modelling mode with aural and kinesthetic instruction, and (2) the comprehensive mode contained aural, kinesthetic and visual instruction. The comprehensive

mode included music reading activities while the modelling mode did not. Kendall examined two questions: (1) Are there advantages to teaching students exclusively with modelling (demonstration and imitation) and, (2) Does the process of learning to read music conflict with the development of aural and technical performance skills? The subjects included 76 fifth-grade students in beginning elementary school bands, all with no previous musical training who underwent testing after four months of lessons. The students were randomly assigned to either the modelling instruction group or the comprehensive instruction group. Four post-tests measured aural musicianship, instrumental performance and melody and rhythm sight reading skills: *Instrumental Ear-to-Hand Coordination Test, Verbal Association Test, Instrumental Performance Test,* and the *Melodic and Rhythmic Sight Reading Test*. Independent judges evaluated the tests of the participants. The results revealed that the introduction of music reading skills during the initial stages of instruction did not impede the development of ear-to-hand coordination skills and both modes of instruction displayed effectiveness in the development of this aural musicianship skill. The comprehensive instruction proved more effective in assisting students with the development of melodic verbal association skills as these students experienced a complete learning cycle where the visual mode reinforced aural and kinesthetic experiences. Also, the students in the comprehensive mode developed better melodic and rhythmic reading skills as shown by the *Melodic and Rhythmic Sight Reading Tests*. Overall this study shows that exposure to music reading activities during initial music instruction does not impede the development of aural musicianship or performance skills. These results show that an aural and kinesthetic approach to teaching music reading along with music reading activities may be an effective approach for beginning instrumentalists.

Another study looked at teaching music reading with conventional versus unconventional notation to grade-one students. Klemish (1970) tested 102 grade-one children from schools in Wisconsin. One group experienced Method 1 which included aural discrimination tasks, simple visual representations of tonal patterns, and a pseudo notation (curved lines, dashes or other types of diagrams). Method 1 emphasized the recognition of patterns that had been sung or heard aurally then tasks to prepare the children for conventional notation. Children assigned to Method 2 followed the same procedures as Method 1 but immediately worked with the music staff without unconventional notation. Different techniques for Method 1 included forming patterns on a flannel board, chalkboard, and charts using large black lines. All groups played step bells to reproduce the patterns with Method 1 children using hand and body movements to show melodic direction. The results displayed no significant differences between the methods. Method 1 improved some skills such as identification of melodic direction, aural matching and singing patterns. Method 2 showed higher scores for recognition of patterns, writing tones dictated from the piano and visual matching. Overall, this study concludes that learning with unconventional notation before conventional notation has little effect when teaching music reading when combined with aural learning first.

It is important to note that these studies which focus on teaching music reading often test aural approaches to music reading versus notational approaches. Currently the available body of research contains little that compares the two methods. This area of investigation could reveal what effects reading approaches have on the different skills related to music reading. Studies on music reading which include young participants at the beginning stages of reading remain scarce. Hodges (2011) remarks that among the few studies on teaching music reading,

the findings are inconsistent. He also observes that the available studies focus on technique and teaching strategies rather than on an underlying theory of music reading. This is true of the aforementioned studies. There persists among piano teachers uncertainty when teaching music reading. Many teachers have encountered situations where a reading approach works well with one student but then not with another. Teachers are generally armed with many diverse strategies when first introducing students to music reading but without a clear understanding or theory of how one learns to read music, developing effective strategies that will guarantee reading success with all students remains elusive.

2.5 Studies on Music Reading in Beginner Piano Method Books

When teaching music reading, piano teachers rely on beginner piano method books to guide students through the first stages of note identification and note reading. No universal music reading method exists for teachers to follow nor is there agreement as to which approach (middle C, multi-key or intervallic) or strategies (mnemonic devices, directional reading, flashcards) will guarantee note reading success. The selected method book will have an important and influential role on the development of music reading skills and should be chosen with care. Gudmundsdottir (2010) emphasizes the importance of reading of staff notation and highlights the neglect of music reading in the field of music education research. Uszler (1992) also reiterates the point:

> Despite the profusion and diversity of piano methods, and the attention paid in pedagogy classes and elsewhere, there is no scientific research into the relative effectiveness of these methods, here, indeed, is an area to which those engaged in pedagogical research must turn their attention (Uszler, 1992 p. 587).

Methods for teaching music reading skills are largely based on conventions. If students fail at fluency in music reading then teachers tend to rely on intuition and experimentation rather than on strategies based on scientific research.

Ballard (2007) analyzes several beginner piano method books to investigate elements of National Standards for music education (US) which include the development of skills for reading music. Her analysis shows that music reading in the method books was developed through major and minor keys and through whole tone, pentatonic, and modal scales. She argues that "although some methods were given a high rating for music reading skills developed through a variety of repertoire…the quality of music was sometimes questionable" (p.75). Beginning piano methods do not properly prepare young students for 20th-century piano literature and some contain the same literature from over 50 years ago. She also comments that compositions in newer method books lack appeal compared to older methods since more tuneful melodies can be played from the middle C approach versus the intervallic or multi-key approach. She suggests that students should be taught to read music in a way that experts process music when they play but does not offer any guidelines for this.

In a study examining three method books, Chen (2013) analyzes their presentations of pre-reading, note reading, technique, rhythm and supplementary books. The study focuses on the following methods: *The Music Tree* (2000) by Frances Clark, Louise Goss, and Sam Holland, *Hal Leonard Student Library* series (1996) by Barbara Kreader, Fred Kern, Phillip Keveren, and Mona Rejino, and *Piano Adventures* (2003) by Nancy and Randall Faber. Chen's analysis of pre-reading shows that *The Music Tree* uses the most pre-reading pieces (55) compared to *Piano Adventures* and *Hal Leonard* with 15 and 16 respectively. No comments are given regarding pre-reading as to

whether this approach is beneficial or necessary for students but she asserts that some piano teachers value spending more time in pre-reading to prepare students for staff notation. In all three method books, the first pieces presented consist of the groups of two or three black keys. When beginning reading on the staff, the methods use very different approaches. *Piano Adventures* introduces the grand staff and landmark notes while *Hal Leonard* introduces the treble staff followed by the bass staff, and *The Music Tree* introduces the staff in stages from 2 lines to 5. Of the three methods, *The Music Tree* adopts a true intervallic approach. Chen shows how the method presents the intervals in the order of 2nd, 5th, 3rd, and lastly the 4th as the interval of a 4th creates an uncomfortable hand position. According to Chen, *Piano Adventures* and *Hal Leonard* use an eclectic approach drawing from the strengths of the reading approaches: middle C, intervallic and multi-key. Overall, the study concludes that each of the three methods present strengths in different areas. Chen asserts that *The Music Tree*, as the pioneer of intervallic reading, provides an excellent curriculum to teach music reading. This comment however, which considers the intervallic approach as the most effective approach to music reading, is based on personal belief rather than on scientific evidence.

Another study by Huang (2007) analyzes piano method books to identify their consistencies with developmental characteristics of children. Although she does not directly analyze the method books for their reading approaches, Huang discusses reading as a general element. Early method books do not offer teachers sequenced instructions of how to teach music fundamentals, nor do they provide any explanation of the reading process (Huang, 2007). During the 20th century, method books began to present materials for reading and rhythmic skills in a systematic way. According to Huang, music reading involves interval recognition,

relationships around groups of notes, and phrases and sections in the context of the entire musical work. Music reading, which utilizes intervals, helps to develop aural imagery in the relationship of sounds. She offers four general elements of music reading (adapted from Richards (1996) and Chronister (1996)) which include: (1) pitch direction, (2) keyboard topography from black keys to white keys, (3) introduction of the musical alphabet, and (4) learning keyboard anchoring points with notation on a staff system (either partial staff or grand staff). In general, the author promotes the intervallic reading approach (also supported by other leading pedagogues, i.e. Max Camp, Frances Clark, Richard Chronister, and Jeanine Jacobson), but she provides no scientific reports to support her comments.

Albergo (1998) compiles a list of common objectives for elementary level piano students derived from current beginner piano method books. She remarks that piano educators continually search for the most effective teaching strategies and frequently highlights the need for specific standards and objectives, as well as for a more structured basis for organizing piano education. As piano methods become more systematized in their approaches to teaching the various elements of music to young students, teachers have begun to rely on the method book to provide the entire sequence of learning. She notes that leading pedagogues (such as Richard Chronister and Jeanine Jacobson), list students reading music within a reasonable length of time as one of the main objectives for piano teachers and comments that the skill of music reading will carry over into one's adult life. Albergo also points out that reading objectives listed in pedagogy texts are not very specific and simply advocates that students should read fluently.

Nelson (2013) conducts a study to determine what order teachers of beginning piano students introduce musical concepts during the first year of study, the piano method books

used, and if the teachers approach musical concepts in line with the order used in the method books. She remarks on the limited research demonstrating the effectiveness of piano method books on whether learning theories have been applied to the teaching of piano. In the traditional approach to piano teaching, reading music is the most important aspect with an emphasis on the musical performance of pieces. Nelson asserts that, although the traditional method aims to teach students to read music, considerable variation exists in the ways teachers implement this process. She provides examples such as whole versus partial staff, first pieces on the white keys versus black keys, C position or no particular position. She asks pertinent questions regarding these decisions, such as did any of the method book composers use a learning theory? Or why do method books progress in the order they do? Like Albergo (1998), Nelson also discusses the absence of universal standards for private piano teaching and the lack of a standard curriculum. In her historical review of piano methods, she comments on the multitude of books which explain how to play keyboard instruments, but little is written for the beginner or for the teacher on how to start a beginner student. She observes that "it was assumed the teacher would know how to start a beginner, would give all the necessary instruction for reading the music and would find the appropriate materials for his/her students" (p.24). Nelson recommends that teachers research method books to see if the music symbols introduced and reinforced help or hinder music reading.

Dueck (2023) examines ten beginner piano method books and seven sight reading books to determine if the chunking technique (a process of grouping notational elements into meaningful units), is systematically developed. The study analyzes the types and sizes of patterns, the frequency of reinforcement within each text, and also examines pattern-related

instructions, concepts and visual cues included in each text. Dueck concludes that the selected books lack systematic development of chunking technique across all materials. She stresses the importance of pattern recognition and the need for incorporating written instructions and visual cues to encourage chunking within beginner piano methods.

Beginner piano method books have been scrutinized for various elements, such as technique (Sung, 2017), learning styles (Madved, 1987), and curriculum order (Nelson, 2015) among others, but none have fully examined the presentation of music reading. Analysis of method books provides valuable information for piano teachers. From these and other studies, a teacher can determine which method(s) best accommodates pedagogical issues such as age appropriateness or pacing and sequencing of information for example. With respect to music reading, the studies included in this review highlight the need for empirical evidence. Since teachers depend heavily on methods books to lead students through the music reading process, research should be undertaken to provide supportive evidence for the reading approaches endorsed by pedagogical texts and utilized in method books. Albergo comments that piano teaching in general is a profession where one teaches as one has been taught, or lessons consist of a series of preparing a student for the next performance, exam etc., or the teacher relies on the method book to give content and direction throughout the year (Albergo, 1998). Lomax (1990) concludes that “although note reading is such an important instructional objective that piano teaching methods are categorized by their approach to this concept, no studies exist which compare these approaches for teaching effectiveness” (p.44). Scientific evidence which supports and confirms the strength of one reading approach over another would positively impact the piano teaching field and in particular piano method books.

2.6 Studies on Young Pianists and Music Reading

Although research examining the music reading abilities of children remains limited, the existing body of literature reveals noteworthy outcomes that should not be overlooked. A study by Gudmundsdottir (2010b) analyzes the music reading performances of six-to thirteen-year-old pianists to establish types of pitch reading errors and the effect of age on pitch reading errors. The study concludes that although young and older students make similar types of pitch reading errors, the younger students produce significantly more incorrect pitches, redundant pitches, and contour violating errors. In another study comparing child and adult pianists (ages nine to twenty-six years old), temporal constraints greatly affect the novice performers compared to the older pianists. This study asserts that younger performers make many more pitch reading errors, lack temporal control with frequent interruptions when performing, and demonstrate less ability to plan ahead compared to older pianists with more experience (Drake and Palmer, 2000). In a cognitive modelling study, Emond and Comeau (2013) investigate how beginner piano students process musical notation using either the middle C approach or the intervallic approach. Through an ACT-R cognitive model, the researchers simulate the mental operations of novice piano students when decoding written notation into motor actions. The simulations reveal that the middle C reading approach requires less cognitive demand on the learner compared to the intervallic approach by requiring less declarative knowledge and fewer processing steps. This suggests that the middle C reading approach is less demanding for beginner students at the earliest stages of music reading. My own study (DiCienzo, 2015) compares note reading of twenty-two children seven-to eleven-years old with six months to three years of music instruction using either an eclectic or middle C reading approach. The study determines that

middle C students perform slightly better than the eclectic students on single note identification, solid and broken intervals, three-note patterns in G position, and sight reading. However, the eclectic students perform better in keyboard identification and three-note patterns in C position.

Clearly, more research into the music reading processes, abilities and habits of beginner piano students is needed to develop effective teaching strategies and to support different types of learners during the early stages of music reading development. Music reading ability, even at the novice stage, can foster children's confidence at the piano, both during lessons and in at home practice. When a student can look at a piece of music and understand what it asks of them, they experience a sense of capability that fuels motivation and can lead to long-term engagement with piano study.

2.7 Studies on Sight Reading

Research on sight reading and music reading cognition offers a foundation for understanding how to teach reading to beginner piano students. Although these studies reveal how skilled musicians process notation, their outcomes can be adapted for use with beginner students. Piano students taught with notation-first methods typically engage extensively in music reading as part of the learning process. They are often assigned new pieces at every lesson, given review pieces, and sight read through new repertoire. For the beginner student, music reading activities and exercises create opportunities for review and reinforcement and allows the teacher to assess the student's comprehension of music reading concepts. Also, the specific task of sight reading can strengthen overall music reading ability of beginner students by requiring the quick identification of patterns, intervals, notes and rhythms which assist in overall reinforcement of music reading concepts.

One can compare fluency in music reading with fluency in text reading where language literacy plays an essential role in students' academic success at school (Dirkse, 2009). Literacy in language enables a person to communicate freely in a variety of modes, allows for creativity, the acquisition of new knowledge, and to enjoy the process of reading as a pastime. In the same manner, music reading ability allows pianists to explore music from many genres, participate in collaborative music making with ease, expand their knowledge of piano repertoire, and can play new music for their own enjoyment. From a professional perspective, music reading proficiency facilitates work as a church musician, ensemble player, collaborative pianist, vocal or instrumental coach, or teacher. Studies in music reading span diverse approaches and examine strategies used by proficient music readers such as, eye movements, eye-hand span, and working memory capacity. This research provides significant value in relation to a deeper understanding of the processes skilled readers employ. These processes also contribute to the understanding of how teachers should approach music reading instruction at the beginner level.

In her review on sight reading studies, Wristen (2005) discusses the strategies utilized by expert sight readers which include the ability to recognize musical patterns and chunk information. These strategies allow expert readers to perceive multiple details of the musical score as a single piece of information. The study also demonstrated how skilled sight readers search for familiar visual cues and process these cues automatically.

Studies on eye movements of skilled pianists have revealed useful strategies to facilitate the teaching of music reading. Many studies focus on eye-hand span (EHS), the distance between eye fixation and hand position (Rosemann et al., 2016) to investigate sight reading ability. EHS shows the distance between the notes currently played (hand position) and the

notes the eye fixates upon (eye position) can "be denoted by an anticipatory time span (length of time between the fixation and performance of a note) or by notes (number of notes between hand and eye position)", (Rosemann et al., 2016). Lim et al., (2019) confirms the role of EHS as not a "decisive indicator of sight reading proficiency but is a strategy that can vary according to the difficulty of the sight reading tasks. Thus, proficient sight readers are performers who are skilled at adjusting their eye-hand span instead of always maintaining an extended span" (Lim et al., 2019, p. 1). Goolsby (1994) notices that skilled sight readers directed fixations to all areas of the notation compared to less-skilled sight readers who performed note-by-note using long fixations. He concludes that "skilled readers look farther ahead in the notation, then back to the point of performance, and have a larger perceptual span than less-skilled sight readers" (Goolsby, 1994, p. 97). He refers to the rapid eye movements that occur between fixations as saccades, left to right eye movements as progressive saccades and right to left movements as regressive saccades. Skilled sight readers use more progressive and regressive fixations compared to less-skilled sight readers and use long notes to explore the notation and read expression markings. These results indicate that "some system of 'chunking' is used to grasp more than one note, or item of visual detail, during a single fixation" (Goolsby, 1994, p. 121).

Structural perception is another area of research important for providing useful strategies for music reading instruction. Structural perception refers to the identification of musical structures in the music such as chords, scales or musical patterns, compositional form, and style. The research suggests that expert sight readers with formal music training in Western European art music have acquired an understanding of the idioms and rules of various genres and that they have "internalized the constraints and structures implicit in the music of their

culture and may use these to modify their reading behaviour in a manner analogous to ordinary reading" (Sloboda, 1974, p. 5). Therefore, the skilled reader has a greater understanding of the underlying structures of music which allows for a greater perceptual span (how far ahead a reader can grasp chunks of musical information), which in turn facilitates the reading process. In a study investigating visual, auditory, and kinesthetic processing in piano sight reading, Ronkainen and Kuusi (2009) found that pianists rely on visual feedback (glancing at the hands or keyboard) and auditory feedback (the sounds heard while playing) while sight reading but familiarity of musical style and structure influenced the type of feedback the pianist relied upon. When performing tonal music, the pianists leaned toward auditory feedback because the familiarity of the musical style allowed for less dependence on visual feedback which led to ease of reading. However, while performing an atonal piece, visual feedback played a central role in the sight reading task. These results support research (Goolsby 1994; Sloboda 1974; Waters et al. 1998) which identifies perceptual span, pattern recognition (chunking), awareness of structural factors in the score, and prior knowledge of music and theory as essential for fluent and effective sight reading (Ronkainen and Kuusi, 2009) which in turn supports overall music reading ability.

Research demonstrates the importance auditory feedback and a strong sense of inner hearing (the ability to mentally hear sounds represented by notational symbols) to support music reading. Fourie (2004), recommends that teachers develop within their students a sensitivity to sound before introducing notation (i.e., Suzuki Method), and to create sound-maps through activities like visualization, composition, keyboard harmony, and playing by ear. Wristen (2005) adds that students can be assisted in pattern recognition with exercises which ask the student to

complete pitch or rhythmic patterns. She suggests that, for students to be familiar with musical structures, they must study music theory and history, participate in composition and improvisation activities, and hear and play music of various styles. Several studies highlight the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application indicating a need for teaching materials that focus on exercises which develop music reading strategies (i.e., pattern recognition) and the transfer of the strategies into reading pieces (Hardy 1992, Fourie 2004, Wristen 2005, Zhukov 2014).

As this review illustrates, the aforementioned studies yield numerous music reading strategies that, although focused primarily on skilled readers, may be adapted for application across all levels of piano instruction. The music reading skills highlighted in this review may be readily translated into pedagogical exercises and activities designed to support the development of beginner music reading. Even at the most rudimentary level, children can engage in pattern recognition, aural skills training, eye-tracking skills, and the acquisition of basic theoretical knowledge. A need exists for materials that utilize findings from music reading research to provide teachers with clear pedagogical tools for instruction and to equip students with effective music reading strategies. As previously discussed, further research on music reading should incorporate studies involving young pianists in order to better understand the development of music reading skills at the beginner level. For example, it would be interesting to investigate the music reading difficulties faced by newer readers and to examine children's perceptions of music reading. Piano pedagogy programs should disseminate current research on music reading and provide teachers with practical, research-informed strategies for teaching music reading.

Strengthening music reading skills among students may enhance their overall enjoyment of piano study and foster positive engagement with learning and performance.

2.8 Communities of Practice

Social, group learning has existed in human society as a knowledge-based social structure since "we lived in caves and gathered around the fire to discuss strategies for cornering prey, the shape of arrowheads, or which roots were edible" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder 2002, p. 5). Indeed, the idea of people working together to solve problems and share knowledge has existed throughout human history and can be found in the form of corporations of metalworkers, potters and masons in ancient Greece, guilds during the Middle Ages, and through apprenticeships which still carry on today (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). These types of learning situations, centred around social groups identify as Communities of Practice (CoP), groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something and interact regularly to learn and improve (Wenger, 2011). In today's society, CoP can also be found in social online environments such as Facebook, chat rooms, or Discord among many others. In the realm of piano teaching, independent piano teachers rarely adopt the CoP model. Teachers in Ontario, Canada can belong to professional music associations such as The Ontario Registered Music Teachers' Association (ORMTA), which includes membership to the Canadian Federation of Music Teachers' Association (CFMTA). However, members must fulfill certain educational requirements which exclude teachers without grade nine conservatory education. In addition, local branch meetings of ORMTA, which may foster comradery among colleagues, do not follow the CoP structure and function as a group meeting with clear mandates (i.e. organizing student workshops, recitals or

competitions). This gap in the field of piano pedagogy limits access to a legitimate space in which CoP could offer teachers opportunities for learning and collaboration.

Etienne Wenger, an educational theorist, and Jean Lave, a social anthropologist developed the concept of CoP in the early 1990s. Lave's work studying apprenticeships of various groups such as Yucatec Mayan midwives and Alcoholics Anonymous, led her to interpret learning "not as a process of socially shared cognition that results in the end in the internalization of knowledge by individuals, but as a process of becoming a member of a sustained community of practice" (Lave, 1991, p.65). Along with her student Wenger, they developed the theory of Situated Learning described as the process and development of learning where individuals have the opportunity to participate in a Community of Practice (Herrera, 2020). As Wenger explains:

> Collective learning results in practices that reflects both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations. These practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise. It makes sense, therefore, to call these kinds of communities, *communities of practice* (Wenger, 1998, p.45).

Within a CoP, people may connect formally or informally through shared expertise and passion, sharing knowledge, creating new understanding, and solving problems through community interaction (Brown & Duguid, 1991). CoP can be found in all aspects of everyday life permeated by all types of people potentially belonging to several CoP. Formal and informal clubs, learning networks, and even street gangs illustrate examples of CoP along with structured and unstructured groups in the business world (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002).

Despite the differences in their size, function, and membership, CoP all share three basic fundamental elements: "a *domain* of knowledge, which defines a set of issues; a *community* of

people who care about this domain; and the shared *practice* that they are developing to be effective in their domain" (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p.27). The *domain* is the identity of the CoP. This shared interest legitimizes the community and gives the community purpose and value: "the domain inspires members to contribute and participate, guides their learning, and gives meaning to their actions" (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p.28). Without a domain, you have simply a group of like-minded individuals. The domain provides the reason for the community, guides their learning, and creates a sense of accountability to the body of knowledge created by the community (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). The element of *community* fosters relationships among the members. A successful community allows the sharing of ideas, discussion among members, building of relationships, and the ability to help one another (Wenger, 2011). For a community to be considered a CoP, there must be interaction and learning among members. Wenger provides an example from the art world: "the Impressionists used to meet in cafes and studios to discuss the style of painting they were inventing together. These interactions were essential to making them a community of practice even though they often painted alone" (Wenger, 2011, p. 2). To build a CoP, members must meet or interact on a regular basis to allow for the development of a shared understanding of the domain, approach to their practice, and over time create a common history and identity (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). The *practice* consists of "a set of frameworks, ideas, tools, information, styles, language, stories, and documents that community members share" (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p.28). The practice refers to the specific knowledge created, shared and maintained by the community. Members should have a baseline of common knowledge but within the community individual members may have different areas of expertise

and strengths. In general, a CoP will have a defined way of doing things, a set of common approaches, and shared standards (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). Wenger emphasizes the importance of developing these three elements of a CoP in parallel and that these elements will be constantly changing and evolving over time (Wenger, 2011).

CoP can take many forms and can go by various names or be nameless. According to Wenger, McDermott & Snyder (2002), a CoP can vary in size from a few people to hundreds with very large communities generally subdivided by geographic region. A CoP can also vary in life span where some have existed for many years, centuries even, while other being short-lived. As Wenger explains, "a community of practice's life cycle is determined by the value it provides to its members, not by an institutional schedule" (Wenger, 2008, p. 4). Since CoP depend on regular interaction, many communities have members living in the same city or work in the same building, but communities can be successful with members spread across a large geographic region or meet entirely online with members from around the globe. CoP can also be composed of people from the same discipline (most common) or have people with diverse backgrounds. Some communities will begin unintentionally brought together by a common problem or need, while others can be intentionally created to solve a problem or share knowledge. CoP do not work as a "team" or functional business unit in that members have no assigned roles; there is no project leader, and no responsibilities are required of each participant (Probst & Borzillo, 2008). CoP show greater flexibility and gain definition from shared knowledge rather than by tasks, existing because they provide value to their members (Wenger, 1998). For example, at Siemens (a technology company focused on industry, infrastructure, transport, and healthcare), engineers from different units exchange technical knowledge on how to build improved automotive

systems (Probst & Borzillo, 2008). At a Hill's Pet Nutrition facility in the US, line technicians formed a CoP, which meets weekly to discuss recent successes, frustrations and upcoming challenges (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). In a business context, CoP can assist in fostering an environment of sharing knowledge among different departments, be an arena for innovation, and allow ease of learning for new employees (Probst & Borzillo, 2008). These communities also generate a shared repertoire of ideas, develop resources such as tools, documents, routines, and vocabulary that carry the accumulated knowledge of the community (Smith, 2003). CoP function as self-organizing systems, which help to facilitate relationships and trust among its members through cooperation and knowledge sharing (Smith, 2003).

In the CoP model, novices join the community and learn at the periphery. As they become more competent, they move to the centre of the community as masters or experts (Smith, 2003). Of course, learning in a CoP happens for everyone, not only novices, with all members contributing to the sharing of knowledge. Learning in a CoP involves social participation rather than the simple acquisition of knowledge. This way of learning differs from experiential learning in that it involves people "being full participants in the world and in generating meaning…For newcomers, the purpose is not to learn *from* talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn *to* talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 108-109). However, power dynamics in this type of model can potentially be problematic. CoP will have members of varying experience, expertise, age, personality, and authority in the community and power may be evident in terms of degree of participation (Roberts, 2006). Power yielded by those with full participation in the community may prevent peripheral members becoming full community members or create an environment

where peripheral members have a reluctance to share knowledge (Roberts, 2006). Therefore, for CoP to be successful in fostering a positive experience for newcomers, they must create an environment of trust, familiarity and mutual understanding to facilitate effective transfer of knowledge (Roberts, 2006).

In today's society, CoP can also flourish in online environments and function in similar ways to traditional CoP. Virtual communities can be defined as "designed communities using current networked technology, whereas communities of practice emerge within the designed community via the ways their participants designed the community" (Johnson, 2001, p. 45). Online CoP use social media interfaces such as Facebook (among others) to facilitate communication between members of a CoP (Hanson-Smith, 2012). These platforms allow collaboration across multiple geographic regions and time zones compared to traditional CoP. Creating online CoP involves several steps aligned with Wenger's outline of traditional CoP: defining the purpose and domain of the community, creating a virtual space for group interaction, establishing group norms or codes of conduct, and assigning member roles to facilitate subgroups if required (Johnson, 2001). Computer mediated communication (CMC) functions as the main method of communication for online CoP: text, email, chat rooms, instant messaging, and discussion forums. Although face to face communication provides a rich and easy experience for knowledge sharing compared to computer mediated communication, text-based communication has some advantages (Zhang & Watts, 2008). For example, online members may prefer the convenience of CMC because of its availability over geographical and temporal gaps, its capability to reach a large number of members simultaneously, and the possibility of introverted participants, who may be reserved in an in-person CoP, to share their

ideas equally with extroverted participants (Zhang & Watts, 2008; Johnson, 2001). Johnson argues:

> Communities of practice can exist with the current Web-based technologies. However, adequate scaffolding in the form of both technical support and usage of technology for communication and collaboration is necessary. The lack of face-to-face contact in text-based communication tools can actually be an advantage because this environment suppresses traditional group norm behaviour (Johnson, 2001, p. 56).

Remote collaboration also allows for instant help, expertise, and long-term apprenticeship in a safe social setting and perhaps emotional support for those separated from their peers (Hanson-Smith, 2012). Moreover, joining an online CoP may prove much easier than joining an in-person CoP depending upon an individual's personal circumstances (mobility issues, geographic location, transportation issues etc.). Internet and mobile technologies offer a multitude of opportunities for CoP to emerge and allow learning and knowledge sharing in worldwide, collaborative contexts (Hanson-Smith, 2012).

The concept of CoP continues to evolve and faces criticism since some communities have limitations and suffer failure. A CoP may become static and resistant to change such that knowledge which challenges the current identity and practice is dismissed (Roberts, 2006). At times, a community may become entrenched in its routines, making it difficult to change or innovate; in these instances, it becomes easier to create a new CoP rather than work with the existing community (Roberts, 2006). A CoP might fail due to the absence of a committed, core group of members, weak relationships among members, rigidity of competences, lack of a strong identity, or the use of inappropriate tools, such as documentation or visual support to illustrate their practices (Probst & Borzillo, 2008). In addition, arrogance of viewing oneself as the expert in a domain can lead a community to claim ownership of that knowledge so the community does

not share the knowledge with other CoP or with other organizational members (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). Furthermore, a CoP with very strong relationships between its members may prevent members from critiquing one another, stifling creativity and improvement of practices and creating a barrier for entry for new members (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). In a business setting, a CoP may also be subject to manipulation to satisfy the ambition of a corporation (Probst & Borzillo, 2008) or may have difficulty forming or successfully functioning due to restructuring, downsizing, and outsourcing, preventing members from forming meaningful relationships within the community (Roberts, 2006).

From a musical perspective, Communities of Musical Practice (CoMP) offer an educational and meaningful space for musicians to learn and perform together. Studies in this area typically investigate the performer experience and illuminate how these communities benefit musicians through shared performance practices along with personal and professional support. A study by Kenny (2012) examined a jazz ensemble from Limerick, Ireland while it formed a CoMP over nine months. The workshop format for the CoMP consisted of instrumental ensembles from beginner to advanced performing ability. The study demonstrated that the CoMP allowed all the members to participate equally in the music making and in the creation of performance traditions within their ensemble while building relationships with one another through their shared practice. Another study by Godwin (2015) examined the CoMP of an all-ages fiddle group in Scotland. The study revealed that participation in a CoMP positively enhanced the group experience and enjoyment of group performance while also fostering a lifelong interest in music-making. A study focused on conservatory students in Finland by Virkkula (2015) also displayed similar outcomes. Students involved in ongoing performance

workshops between professional musicians and music students demonstrated greater motivation to attain their goals, greater responsibility and initiative, and greater overall development of their musical skills. The students also expressed feelings of belonging and increased belief in their abilities. CoMP can also be used to nurture the traditional music of a particular country or community. A study by Westvall & Aragão (2019) examined the CoMP of a large community music school in Rio de Janeiro, *Escola Portátil*, centered around the performance of choro music, an instrumental Brazilian popular music genre. The CoMP fostered pride in the participants Brazilian heritage and promoted the continuance of a musical tradition from generation to the next. Inspired by *Escola Portátil*, Westvall's colleague Simon Bovin Schierup began a CoMP in Sweden, *Spelrum*, to connect musicians, dancers, and artists to develop intercultural exchanges between musicians and music students of diverse backgrounds. Barrett (2005) supplies an overview of CoMP involving children participating in informal music-making scenarios such as playgrounds, church groups, and social interactions. The study concludes that children exercise autonomy and agency within their CoMP and draw on a range of communication, verbal and non-verbal, to practice and produce meaning.

Studies in CoMP involving the perspectives of music teacher experiences remain limited but still demonstrate the value and need for teacher centered research. In a study by Bernard et al. (2018), classroom music educators participated in a CoMP through a Facebook group. Bernard concludes that the online CoMP was successful in providing professional development growth for teachers allowing for different avenues of sharing to emerge compared to a traditional in-person professional development experience. Educators of all ages, experience, musical backgrounds, and location participated equally which proved to be a positive outcome.

She also notes that the CoMP provided an ongoing space for teachers to interact, where they "have the opportunity to take interest in and participate with one another's concerns, ideas, triumphs, and stumbles" (Bernard, 2018, p.91) which adds additional layers of interaction not possible in a traditional professional development format. In another study with elementary classroom music teachers, Blair (2008) concludes that belonging to a CoMP provides novice teachers a safe environment to discuss their concerns and struggles. Blair observes that novice teachers experience feelings of inadequacy, isolation, and being overwhelmed by their various duties, which affects their professional self-confidence and can also lead to low professional self-esteem. Blair argues that a CoMP containing novice and experienced teachers allows for more "collaborative growth and mutual engagement than a traditional mentorship can offer" while also providing support in an emotional and professional capacity. Palmquist and Barnes (2015) examine a string orchestra and string teachers Facebook group. This study concludes that the Facebook group facilitated an informal learning network among the members which supports the notion that an online CoP can be successful in creating a viable learning environment.

The field of piano pedagogy can greatly benefit from the CoP model. A regular gathering or meeting of piano teachers to discuss music reading, as well as to share teaching ideas and tools creates an ideal forum for independent piano teachers who mainly work isolated from their colleagues. CoP can create successful learning environments by engaging members in meaningful activities such as building relationships, knowledge sharing, participating in improving practices, and can facilitate innovation and creativity. If a CoP can maintain the balance between the main elements of domain, community and practice, the community will evolve and thrive (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). CoMP for piano pedagogy professional

development should be promoted and facilitated through teaching organizations and university pedagogy programs so that teachers have opportunities to connect with others, to share knowledge, to explore better teaching practices, and for new teachers to gain access to mentors. Belonging to a CoMP benefits the individual teacher and raises the teaching standard in a community. All teachers regardless of experience can benefit from collaborative learning environments whether they exist in-person or online and the CoP model can provide a practical space for piano teachers to improve and expand upon their knowledge and experience.

2.9 Conclusion

Since no unified method of teaching beginner music reading currently exists, teachers rely on convention, intuition, experimentation or turn to their colleagues for support regarding music reading instruction. This study will also reveal that few pedagogical texts contain specific teaching strategies for music reading and some promote the intervallic approach without providing supporting scientific evidence. In contrast, studies on music reading support the sound before sign approach along with intervallic reading and recommend activities which develop aural and rhythmic skills such as composing and improvising. Piano teachers rely on method books to provide a sequenced, progressive curriculum for beginner students and as such, they should be founded upon scientific research. However, some of these books remain in the same format as when they were first published over fifty years ago. Undertaking research remains important for evaluating how these books align with the scientific literature and for identifying the most effective approaches to music reading with young children. While existing literature offers valuable insights into piano pedagogy and reading approaches, it also reveals a notable lack of empirical research examining how teaching materials support music reading development

in beginning piano students, a gap that the present study seeks to address through the methodology outlined in the next chapter.

Chapter 3:
Methodology

The language of music is common to all generations and nations;
it is understood by everybody, since it is understood with the heart.
Gioacchino Rossini

Piano teachers spend the first year of lessons acquainting young beginner students to music reading concepts such as keyboard orientation, the music alphabet, the staff, note identification and of course, the process of music reading. Despite the prominence placed on music reading acquisition for beginner piano students, little research exists on the topic. As discussed in the literature review, most scientific studies focus on piano sight reading of accomplished musicians to determine the strategies employed by these highly skilled performers while research into the music reading abilities of young beginner students remains sparse. Studies investigating beginner music reading from a performance perspective may be minimal due to feasibility issues, such as recruiting young participants in a certain age range, the need for specialized equipment and software, technical knowledge of this equipment and software, difficulty recruiting a large pool of participants who are taught with the same reading approach, or the complexity of evaluating piano performances versus other instruments. The above constraints also influenced my decision to examine beginner music reading from a pedagogical perspective by considering the materials used for teaching beginner music reading and investigating the tools and strategies employed by teachers of young students. Three research questions guide this study:

1. To what extent are music reading strategies and concepts identified in the scholarly literature and pedagogical texts present in beginner piano method books?

2. What are teachers' perceptions of music reading instruction and how do they navigate the different resources and approaches?

3. In what ways do teachers, who are members of a Music for Young Children® (MYC®) Community of Practice, engage with each other about teaching music reading?

A qualitative approach serves the majority of the project which examines text-based materials along with perspectives of piano teachers. A quantitative element is introduced in the form of a survey and in some components of the method book analysis to support the results of the qualitative portions. Two theoretical frameworks, Social Constructivism and Communities of Practice (CoP), inform the design, data collections, and analysis of this project. The learning theory Social Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) provides the worldview for the entire study and underpins the method book, survey and focus groups data collection and analysis, while the theory of CoP (Lave, 1991; Wenger 1999) specifically informs the data collection and analysis of the MYC® Community of Musical Practice (CoMP). Teacher support is a strong component of this program where new teachers are assigned to a nest, a local group of other MYC® teachers of varying experience that function as a CoMP. By participating in the nest, teachers positively benefit from sharing ideas and teaching strategies while also gaining professional support. This CoMP is an excellent example of how teachers gain and share knowledge about music reading and teaching music reading to beginner students. This chapter will: (1) describe the two theoretical frameworks, (2) outline the research design, (3) describe the development of the analytic tool, and (4) explain the procedures undertaken for the data collection and analysis of the piano method books, pedagogical texts, teacher survey, and teacher focus group discussions.

3.1 Theoretical Frameworks

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) provides the lens through which to interpret and examine the pedagogy texts, beginner piano method books, and the CoP. This theory emphasizes how learning and knowledge building is supported through social interaction and situations, and where the learner is directly involved in the learning process (Kalpana, 2014). Elements of this learning theory appear in teacher materials that promote building upon prior learning, include sufficient reinforcement and review of new concepts, ask questions of the student to reflect on their learning and performance, produce opportunities to explore new reading concepts through creative activities such as composition or improvisation, and provide collaborative experiences through duet or ensemble playing. A piano teacher who embraces a social constructivist view will (Scott, 2006; Adams, 2006):

- focus on the learner
- focus on learning and not on performance
- view pupils as collaborators in the learning process
- allow students to express themselves
- allow pupils to demonstrate their understanding
- ensure pupils have the tools to undertake new challenges
- teach through discussion and ask 'why' and 'how' questions rather than dictate information
- build new material upon the pupil's prior knowledge
- connect learning material to relatable contexts
- incorporate student accountability during lessons
- account for differences in experiences and preferred learning styles

A teacher embodying a social constructivist philosophy will function as an organizer and guide throughout the learning process and will work to "provide students with opportunities and incentives to construct knowledge and understanding" (Adams, 2006). Another tenet of this theory is the concept of the gap which exists between what a learner can do without help and

what they can accomplish with help. In *Mind in Society*, Vygotsky (1978) refers to this gap as the Zone of Proximal Development: "It is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p.86). Therefore, children learn best when working with others, and it is through collaboration of working with those who are more skilled (i.e. teachers and more advanced students) that enables children to learn and internalize new concepts, skills, and psychological tools (Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010). From a piano pedagogy perspective, this concept is exemplified through the use of rote teaching pieces, a method where students learn pieces without notation and focus on listening, imitation, and memory. Through rote instruction, students are able to perform repertoire of greater difficulty than their current reading ability would otherwise allow. Similarly, assigning a beginner student a piece slightly above their present reading level enables the student to perform more challenging repertoire with guidance from the teacher. I consider myself a social constructivist teacher and in my piano studio of over sixty students, I incorporate this worldview in my teaching and in the way I facilitate learning with my students. For this study, a social constructivist position informed the creation of the matrix to analyze the beginner piano method books, as well as the decision to include CoMP within my project on beginner music reading.

Communities of Practice (CoP)

The social constructivist perspective aligns with the social learning theory Communities of Practice (CoP) discussed in the literature review. To summarize, a CoP perspective "advocates that learning is shaped by culture, is socially constructed and jointly created through shared

experience" (Kenny, 2014, p. 397). CoP are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning through a shared domain of interest and build relationships through the sharing of knowledge to create a repertoire of resources to improve their practice (Wenger, 2011). I use a CoP framework to investigate how CoMP support new and experienced teachers in teaching music reading and with teaching beginner piano students. This framework also allows for the examination of if and how CoMP serves as a CoP enhancing teacher knowledge through communal learning and sharing. As presented in the literature review, CoMP offer people a collaborative space for professional development and support; an examination of an MYC® CoMP sheds light on the role they play with piano teachers in relation to music reading instruction.

3.2 Research Design

This study examines music reading through a mixed-methods research design, a methodological approach that is based on pragmatic research assumptions rather than theoretical hypotheses and utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data to enhance the findings (Cresswell, 2003). A mixed-methods design allows for a thorough examination of music reading through different data sources: scholarly studies, pedagogical texts, beginner piano method books, teacher perceptions of music reading through a survey and focus groups, and teacher perceptions of music reading who belong to a CoMP. It also enables the triangulation of data to confirm and strengthen the results of both the qualitative and quantitative portions of the study. Specifically, a convergent mixed-methods design is undertaken where the data is collected and analyzed in a similar timeframe and where both the quantitative data analysis of the teacher study and the

qualitative data analysis of the method books and focus groups inform one another (Fetters, Curry & Cresswell, 2013).

Five separate methods provide a means to examine the topic of music reading of young beginner piano students: (1) the creation of an analytical tool to analyze the piano method books, (2) the use of the analytical tool to support the content analysis of the piano method books, (3) a survey to gather information about teacher perceptions of beginner music reading and sight reading instruction during piano lessons, (4) four focus groups to examine teacher experiences of music reading instruction, including their use of beginner piano method books, common teaching strategies, and reading challenges, from the perspectives of independent and group piano teachers, and (5) two of the four focus groups to explore how belonging to a CoMP supports music reading instruction with beginners for MYC® piano teachers. The table below shows how the methods align with the research questions (see Table 3.1). To address research question one, an analytic tool derived from strategies identified in the scholarly literature, is employed to support the content analysis of beginner piano method books. Research question two is addressed through a web-based survey and four focus groups examining teachers' perceptions of music reading instruction. Finally, research question three is explored through discussions within two of the four focus groups, which focus specifically on participants' experiences belonging to a Community of Musical Practice.

Table 3.1: Summary of research questions, methods and data sources.

Research Questions	Methods	Source of Data
To what extent are music reading strategies and concepts identified in the scholarly literature and pedagogical texts	Creation of an analytic tool (see page 56) for analyzing beginner piano method books.	18 research studies of music reading strategies and concepts 20 pedagogical texts

present in beginner piano method books?		
	Use of this tool to support the content analysis of piano method books.	23 piano method books
What are teachers' perceptions of music reading instruction and how do they navigate the different resources and approaches?	Web based survey (See Appendix A) seeking teachers' perceptions and experiences of - teaching music reading - teaching sight reading and the resources used.	247 practicing, independent piano teachers
	Four focus groups to examine more deeply the teachers experiences and use of resources. (See Focus Group Protocol Appendix B to D)	13 teachers of beginner piano students
In what ways does belonging to a Music for Young Children® (MYC®) Community of Musical Practice (CoMP) support teachers in music reading instruction?	Two focus groups who, in addition to contributing to the above focus groups, engaged in conversation specifically about their membership of an MYC® CoMP and interactions with other MYC® teachers. (See Appendix E)	5 teachers who are members of the MYC® community

Development of the Analytic Tool

To examine twenty-three beginner piano method books, I adapt an analytic tool originally designed by Floyd and Haning (2015), who investigated sight singing textbooks using deductive content analysis through pre-determined, researcher-created categories prior to the analysis of the texts. The categories of the analytic tool categories are derived from criteria extracted from pedagogy texts and scholarly studies regarding music reading concepts. Twenty pedagogy texts are reviewed for information regarding criteria for selecting beginner piano method books and music reading concepts (see Table 3.2). The selected texts are drawn from the scholarly literature review of Chapter 1 as well as the recommended resources list of piano pedagogy

books located in the *Royal Conservatory of Music 2022 Syllabus* (p.132). The texts include chapters on beginner or elementary pedagogy or incorporate sections pertaining to music reading or sight reading.

Table 3.2: *List of Selected Piano Pedagogy Textbooks*

Title	Author	Date of Publication
For All Piano Teachers	Cora B. Ahrens & G .D. Atkinson	1954
The Young Pianist	Joan Last	1972
The Pianist's Problems	William S. Newman	1984
Challenging World of Piano Teaching	Bernard Kirshbaum	1986
More Than Teaching	Earle Moss	1989
The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher	Marienne Uszler, Stewart Gordon and Elyse Mach	1991
Teaching Piano: The Synthesis of Mind, Ear and Body	Max W. Camp	1992
Questions and Answers: Practical Advice for Piano Teachers	Frances Clark	1992
How to Teach Piano Successfully	James W. Bastien	1995
Practical Piano Pedagogy: The Definitive Text for Piano Teachers and Pedagogy Students	Dr. Martha Baker-Jordan	2003
The Art of Teaching Piano: The classic guide and reference book for all piano teachers	Ed. Denes Agay	2004
A Piano Teacher's Legacy	Richard Chronister	2005
Piano Pedagogy: A Practical Approach	Edward J. Parker	2006
The Independent Piano Teacher's Studio Handbook	Beth Klingenstein	2009

Title	Author	Date of Publication
Teaching Piano in Groups	Christopher Fisher	2010
Creative Piano Teaching 4th Ed.	Eds. James Lyke, Geoffrey Hadon & Catherine Rollin	2011
The Success Factor in Piano Teaching: Making Practice Perfect	Elvina Pearce	2014
Fourth Finger on B-Flat	Joanne Haroutounian	2012
Professional Piano Teaching Vol. 1 2nd Ed.	Jeanine M. Jacobson	2015
Inspired Piano Teaching	Marvin Blickenstaff	2024

Scholarly studies on expert sight reading and beginner method books discussed in the literature review in Chapter 1 are also analyzed for music reading concepts and incorporated into the creation of the analytic tool (see Table 3.3). Alongside music reading, the categories of book design, teacher support, and student activities have been added as they also represent important elements of music reading instruction for students and teachers. Taken together, this tool provides a summary of forty-one music reading concepts found in multiple resources and representing various perspectives of beginner music reading.

Table 3.3: Analytic Tool

Topic	Reference
Music Reading Concepts	
Reinforcement of new concepts by two or more pieces	Parker (2006), Lyke et al. (2011), Jacobson (2015)
One new concept presented per piece	Lyke et al. (2011), Jacobson (2015)
Inclusion of pre-staff notation (no staff lines)	Bastien (1995), Chronister (2005), Lyke et al. (2011), Chen (2013), Camp (1992), Jacobson (2015)
Inclusion of partial-staff notation (some staff lines)	Chen (2013), Blickenstaff (2024)

Use of pieces on the black keys	Agay (2004), Chronister (2005), Huang (2007), Chen (2013), Jacobson (2015)
Introduction of reading by direction/pattern	Kirshbaum (1986), Camp (1992), Clark (1992), Hardy (1992), Bastien (1995), Fourie (2004), Chronister (2005), Wristen (2005), Huang (2007), Kopiez & Lee (2006), Klingenstein (2009), Fisher (2010), Zhukov (2014), Jacobson (2015), Blickenstaff (2024)
Introduction of the music alphabet	Huang (2007), Fisher (2010), Lyke et al. (2011), Jacobson (2015)
Logical presentation of keyboard notes	Huang (2007), Jacobson (2015)
Logical presentation of rhythm note order	Jacobson (2015)
Logical presentation of note order on staff	Jacobson (2015)
If intervallic/eclectic: presentation of interval order	Clark (1992), Camp (1992), Bastien (1995), Lyke et al. (2011), Jacobson (2015), Blickenstaff (2024)
Use of landmark notes	Camp (1992), Clark (1992), Agay (2004), Huang (2007), Fisher (2010), Lyke et al. (2011), Jacobson (2015), Blickenstaff (2024)
Pieces with note names written in some or all of the notes	Jacobson (2015)
Grand staff introduced at once or each clef separately	Camp (1992), Agay (2004), Fisher (2010)
Gradual progression from stepwise motion to skips	Blickenstaff (2024)
Pieces in C position	
Pieces in G position	
Fingering supplied for essential notes only or for many notes	Parker (2006), Klingenstein (2009), Jacobson (2015)
Introduction of bar line, double bar line, repeat sign	Jacobson (2015)
Inclusion of aural skills (improvisation, rote playing, listening activities)	Ahrens & Atkinson (1954), Last (1972), Kirshbaum (1986), Fourie (2004), Chronister (2005), Wristen (2005), Huang (2007), Haroutounian (2012), Lyke et al. (2011), Jacobson (2015), Blickenstaff (2024)
Inclusion of composition activities	Camp (1992), Bastien (1995), Wristen (2005), Haroutounian (2012), Jacobson (2015)
Inclusion of transposition activities	Bastien (1995), Wristen (2005), Fisher (2010), Jacobson (2015), Blickenstaff (2024)

Inclusion of rhythmic activities	Wristen (2005), Zhukov (2014a)
Introduction of accidentals	Camp (1992), Lyke et al. (2011), Jacobson (2015)
Introduction of key signatures	Parker (2006), Lyke et al. (2011)
Introduction of time signatures	Jacobson (2015)
Introduction of dynamic signs	Parker (2006), Jacobson (2015)
Introduction of other signs (staccato, octave, fermata etc.)	Camp (1992), Parker (2006), Jacobson (2015)
Book Design	
Use of decorative illustrations	Bastien (1995), Parker (2006), Lyke et al. (2011), Comeau (2017), Haroutounian (2012), Jacobson (2015)
Use of informative diagrams	Comeau (2017), Haroutounian (2012), Jacobson (2015)
Large print for text (easy to read)	Bastien (1995), Parker (2006), Lyke et al. (2011), Haroutounian (2012), Jacobson (2015)
Large notation size (easy to read)	Bastien (1995), Parker (2006), Lyke et al. (2011), Haroutounian (2012), Jacobson (2015)
Portrait or landscape book orientation	Parker (2006)
Teacher Support	
Teacher duet parts included	Last (1972), Kirshbaum (1986), Camp (1992), Parker (2006), Lyke et al. (2011), Jacobson (2015), Blickenstaff (2024)
Option of using backing tracks	Lehmann & Ericsson (1996), Wristen (2005), Lyke et al. (2011)
Directions provided for the teacher throughout the book	Parker (2006), Haroutounian (2012)
Provides a teacher manual	
Provides online teacher support	
Student Activities	
Provides instructions for the student (look at the music while playing, glance at the keyboard, identify patterns etc.)	Ahrens & Atkinson (1954), Last (1972), Goolsby (1994), Agay (2004), Klingenstein (2009), Ronkainen & Kuusi (2009), Jacobson (2015), Rosemann et al. (2016), Lim et al. (2019)
Provides practice directions	Meinz & Hambrick (2010)
Reinforces reading with written components (theory)	Ahrens & Atkinson (1954), Sloboda (1974), Kirshbaum (1986), Bastien (1995), Agay (2004), Fourie (2004),

	Wristen (2005), Parker (2006), Lyke et al. (2011), Haroutounian (2012), Jacobson (2015), Blickenstaff (2024)

Selection of Beginner Piano Method Books

Since this study focuses on the average-age beginner student (six-to-nine-years-old), preschool books intended for ages three to five and adult method books are omitted. Several reasons justify selecting this age range: (1) this age group is cited in pedagogical texts as the most typical age to begin piano lessons; (2) it is the target age for the selected beginner piano method books; and (3) it sets a manageable parameter for the study. To determine which beginner piano methods to include in the study, I rely on piano pedagogy texts to determine which methods are most often selected for review. Since numerous method books are available globally, I limit my selection of method books to North American publications to represent each of the reading approaches: middle C, multi-key, intervallic and eclectic as discussed in the literature review. Also, no sound before sign methods were considered as notation-first methods align with my own experience as a teacher. I also include Canadian-authored publications (*WunderKeys, Let's Begin, Pianokids, The ABC of Piano Playing* and *The Leila Fletcher Piano Course*) and add newer publications (*Piano Safari* and *WunderKeys*) that have garnered a significant following on piano pedagogy Facebook groups. Since method books generally cover multiple levels, only the first level or primer of each method book series is analyzed. By examining the first text in each series, it becomes possible to identify the foundational music reading concepts to which students are introduced and to analyze how these concepts are presented within each reading approach. Twenty-three beginner piano method books (see Table 3.4) are selected for the analysis that follows and are grouped by reading approach.

Table 3.4: List of Selected Beginner Piano Method Books

TITLE	AUTHOR *Canadian Author	YEAR OF PUBLICATION *Canadian Publication
Multi-Key Approach		
Piano Town Primer	Diane Hidy, Keith Snell	2004
Music for Piano Book 1	Robert Pace	2006
Bastien Piano Basics Primer	James Bastien	2021
Intervallic Approach		
Piano Discoveries Book A	Marvin Blickenstaff and Lynn Freeman Olson	1983
The Music Tree: Time To Begin	Frances Clark, Louise Goss and Sam Holland	2000
Celebrate Piano Lesson and Musicianship 1A	Cathy Albergo, J. Mitzi Kolar, and Mark Mrozinski	2016
Piano Safari Repertoire Book 1	Katherine Fisher and Julie Knerr	2018
Eclectic Approach		
Alfred's Basic Piano Library Lesson Book 1A	Willard A. Palmer, Morton Manus and Amanda Vick Lethco	1988
Hal Leonard Student Library Piano Lessons Book 1	Phillip Keveren, Fred Kern, Mona Rejino and Barbara Kreader	1996
Beanstalk's Basics for Piano Lesson Book Preparatory Level A	*Cheryl Finn and Eamonn Morris	1998
Alfred's Premier Piano Course Lesson Book 1A	Dennis Alexander, Gayle Kowalchyk, E. L. Lancaster, Victoria McArthur and Martha Mier	2005
Piano Adventures Primer	Nancy and Randall Faber	2011
Let's Begin Piano Book Level A	*Debra Wanless	*2015

Helen Marlais' Succeeding at the Piano Preparatory Level 2nd edition	Helen Marlais	2016
WunderKeys Primer Piano Book 1 2nd Edition	*Andrea and Trevor Dow	*2025
Middle C Approach		
The ABC of Piano Playing Book 1	*Boris Berlin	*1983
David Carr Glover Method for Piano Lessons Primer	David Carr Glover	1988
John W. Schaum Piano Course Pre-A The Green Book	John W. Schaum	1996
The Leila Fletcher Piano Course 1	*Leila Fletcher	*2012
Pianokids All In One Primer Lesson Book 1	*Eleanor Gummer	*2012
Piano Pronto Keyboard Kickoff	Jennifer Eklund	2014
Teaching Little Fingers to Play the Piano	John Thompson	2017
John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course	John Thompson	2019

Using the analytic tool (Table 3.3), I review the beginner piano methods for each listed category, but do not evaluate the quality of the material. This qualitative approach allows for a thorough investigation into the various elements of music reading along with other related areas that influence the instruction of music reading, such as student activities, book design, and teacher support materials. In complement to this data, I also survey piano teachers of beginner students.

Survey of Piano Teachers

The survey design is informed by Braun et al. (2021), who discuss the merits of online surveys and their use in qualitative research (see Appendix A). According to the researchers, online surveys can access large geographical populations, offer affordability, allow for responses from a

larger and diverse sample size, and provide a wide-angle lens on the research topic. My survey seeks to generate data about the resources and approaches used by piano teachers to teach music reading and ask questions about demographics, teacher experience, usage of method books, music reading, and sight reading approaches. The survey was completed by 247 piano teachers with 63 teachers, who provided their contact details, indicating their willingness to participate in a focus group.

Administration of the Survey

Survey Monkey served as the platform to create the online survey. The administration of the survey was facilitated by email and sent to piano teachers through the Ontario Registered Music Teachers' Association (ORMTA), posted on ORMTA social media channels and several other provincial RMTAs, as well as on the Facebook group Piano Teacher Canada.

Analysis of the Survey

The survey responses were synthesized as basic descriptive statistics by Survey Monkey and the teachers' qualitative responses to open-ended questions were analyzed through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis seeks "to understand experiences, thoughts, or behaviours across a data set" (Kiger & Varpio, 2020, p.1). I employ theoretical thematic analysis, which is driven by analytic interest, informed by the researcher's questions or framed by a theoretical lens (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I follow the thematic analysis procedure outlined in Braun & Clark (2006) which consists of a six-step process: (1) familiarizing yourself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. This approach provides a sound method for conducting the analysis of the responses written by the survey participants.

Focus Groups

Four focus groups participated in answering questions regarding beginner music reading (see Appendix D). Two groups comprised of independent piano teachers who discussed teaching beginner music reading while the other two groups, comprised of MYC® teachers, discussed beginner music reading along with their perceptions of belonging to a CoMP.

Independent Piano Teacher Focus Groups

The private teacher participants were randomly selected from those who agreed to be contacted from the survey and were emailed an introductory letter and participant consent form (see Appendix B and C). A total of eight teachers participated with four teachers in each group. They represented Canadian piano teachers currently teaching beginner piano students between the ages of six-and nine-years-old. The focus groups were conducted over Zoom and recorded.

MYC® Focus Groups

I contacted the MYC® participants directly through email and gave the same consent form. A total of five teachers participated in the focus groups with three in one group representing an Ontario nest and the second group comprised of two teachers from a Saskatchewan nest. In addition to questions about music reading, these focus groups also discussed belonging to a CoMP and its impact on their teaching of music reading (see Appendix E). Both focus groups were conducted over Zoom and recorded.

Analysis of Transcripts

The conversations of the focus groups were transcribed through Zoom, verified and edited manually and coded using thematic analysis assisted by NVivo software. The focus groups provided an in-depth look at teachers' experiences of teaching music reading as well as

perceptions of method books and challenges to music reading. The focus groups transcripts were analyzed using theoretical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.3 Summary

This research design produces comprehensive data on music reading by integrating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to fully answer the research questions. Investigating the topic from several approaches and perspectives generates robust and meaningful findings on: (1) how music reading is presented in beginner piano method books; (2) if music reading resources align with scientific research; (3) how teachers perceive music reading instruction; and (4) how CoMP support teachers in teaching music reading. With this mixed-methods approach, the results carry significance and validity, with the outcomes of the study benefiting the field of piano pedagogy research.

Chapter 4:
Findings

Without a doubt, I believe that the most important year of piano study for beginning students is the first one. I also believe that their most important teacher is the first one; and I believe that a student's most important piano book is the first one.
Elvina Pearce

For young beginner piano students, the initial years of study are critical for the development of effective music reading habits, and beginner method books often serve as the primary instructional resource for teaching music reading. Consequently, it is important to analyze the music reading content presented in beginner piano method books, examine how these materials are used by teachers, and to identify the instructional strategies teachers employ to support music reading development. This chapter presents: (1) a summary of music reading strategies identified in music reading research, (2) a review of music reading studies discussed within piano pedagogy textbooks, (3) findings derived from the analytic tool used to examine music reading strategies in beginner piano method books, (4) results from the survey exploring teachers' perceptions of music reading, (5) findings from four piano teacher focus groups discussing music reading instruction, and lastly, (6) insights from two MYC® focus groups examining participants' experiences of belonging to a CoMP. This chapter begins with a summary of music reading strategies identified in sight reading studies.

4.1 Music Reading Concepts and Strategies Identified in Music Reading Studies

I consult eighteen studies on music reading and sight reading to determine the strategies pianists employ during music reading tasks (Sloboda, 1974; Hardy, 1992; Goolsby, 1994; Waters et al., 1998; Drake and Palmer, 2000; Fourie, 2004; Wristen, 2005; Kopiez and Lee, 2006; Dirkse, 2009;

Ronkainen and Kuusi, 2009; Gudmundsdottir, 2010b; Pike, 2012; Zhukov, 2014a; Zhukov, 2014b; DiCienzo, 2015; Rosemann et al., 2016; Lim et al., 2019; Dueck, 2023). Although each study often examines specific components of music and sight reading in isolation, the collective findings clearly point to the identification of effective music reading strategies. The strategies are summarized as follows:

- Greater understanding of underlying structures in the score
- Ability to look ahead
- Group individual notes into meaningful patterns (chunking)
- Recognize harmonic, melodic and rhythmic patterns
- Knowledge of music theory and musical styles
- Use auditory and visual feedback
- Ability to audiate
- Possess strong rhythmic skills

These music reading strategies shown above are incorporated in the creation the researcher-created categories of the analytic tool used to examine the beginner piano method books (see Table 3.3). In addition to scholarly music reading studies, I also review piano pedagogy textbooks for the inclusion of music reading strategies.

4.2 Music Reading Concepts and Strategies Identified in Piano Pedagogy Textbooks

Piano pedagogy books offer piano teachers valuable guidance across a broad range of topics related to instruction and the management of an independent piano studio. However, the scope and depth of content in these texts vary considerably. Some provide general coverage of numerous topics, including both pedagogical and business-related issues, while others adopt a

more narrowly defined focus and concentrate primarily on teaching practice. With respect to music reading, piano pedagogy texts may include overviews of beginner method books, explanations of common reading approaches (e.g., middle C, multi-key, intervallic), discussions of sight-reading, and, in some cases, specific strategies for music reading acquisition. When addressing music reading, certain authors use the term sight-reading broadly to describe the general process of reading music, thereby subsuming music reading concepts and instructional strategies under this designation. For the purposes of this dissertation, music reading is defined as the acquisition of music reading skills, the act of performing while reading from a notated score, and the rehearsal or practice of repertoire using notation, whereas sight-reading is defined as the task-specific ability to perform a piece of music without prior rehearsal (Kopiez & Lee, 2006). To address the first research question, twenty piano pedagogy texts were reviewed for their inclusion of music reading concepts to inform the design of the analytic tool (see Table 3.3). All but five of the selected texts are represented in the analytic tool used to examine the beginner piano method books. The five omitted texts do not include content related to music reading (Newman, 1984; Moss, 1989; Uszler, 1991; Baker-Jordan, 2003; Pearce, 2014). Although the analytic tool draws on a broad representation of piano pedagogy texts, Table 4.1 illustrates that many contain only limited discussion of music reading concepts.

Table 4.1 Number of Pedagogical Text Inclusions of Music Reading Concepts in the Analytic Tool

Piano Pedagogy Text	Number of Inclusions	Piano Pedagogy Text	Number of Inclusions
Ahrens & Atkinson (1954)	3	Chronister (2005)	4
Last (1972)	3	Parker (2006)	12

Piano Pedagogy Text	Number of Inclusions	Piano Pedagogy Text	Number of Inclusions
Kirshbaum (1986)	4	Klingenstein (2009)	3
Camp (1992)	8	Fisher (2010)	4
Clark (1992)	2	Lyke et al. (2011)	14
Bastien (1995)	9	Haroutounian (2012)	8
Agay (2004)	4	Jacobson (2015)	26
Blickenstaff (2024)	9		

**See Appendix E for the full summary of music reading content contained in each text.*

Of these fifteen texts, only three contain a substantial amount of music reading concepts for teachers (Parker, 2006; Lyke et al., 2011; Jacobson, 2015).

To support the second and third research questions, I reviewed the texts for music reading content from three perspectives: (1) specific beginner music reading teaching strategies, (2) general comments about music reading, and (3) sight reading strategies. Table 4.2 summarizes the number of inclusions per category for each text.

Table 4.2: Chart of Music Reading Content by Number of Inclusions

Piano Pedagogy Texts	Specific Teaching Strategies	General Music Reading	Sight Reading Content
Ahrens & Atkinson (1954)	2	4	4
Last (1972)	4	1	5
Newman (1984)	0	0	6
Kirshbaum (1986)	0	1	7
Moss (1989)	0	2	1
Uszler et al. (1991)	0	5	0

Piano Pedagogy Texts	Specific Teaching Strategies	General Music Reading	Sight Reading Content
Camp (1992)	7	7	0
Clark (1992)	4	4	2
Bastien (1995)	6	1	1
Baker-Jordan (2003)	0	4	0
Agay (2004)	0	0	12
Chronister (2005)	7	4	1
Parker (2006)	5	3	5
Klingenstein (2009)	0	0	13
Fisher (2010)	17	2	6
Lyke et al. (2011)	0	4	0
Pearce (2014)	0	4	0
Haroutounian (2012)	0	4	0
Jacobson (2015)	16	9	9
Blickenstaff (2024)	5	3	3

As demonstrated in the table, many of the pedagogical texts either lack or include only minimal content related to music reading, and most do not provide *specific* teaching strategies or clear guidance on how to facilitate music reading development with young beginner students. Four notable exceptions stand out: Agay (2004), Klingenstein (2009), Fisher (2010) and Jacobson (2015). These texts incorporate a substantial number of music reading strategies and provide numerous examples. Although Fisher (2010) is specifically oriented toward group piano instruction, the strategies presented can be easily adapted for use in private piano lessons.

4.3 Music Reading Concepts and Strategies Identified in Beginner Piano Method Books

In addition to the piano pedagogy texts, I examine twenty-three beginner piano method books selected from previous research on piano method books and from piano pedagogy textbooks that included overviews of method books, for their presentation of music reading concepts. To these, I add three recent publications: *Piano Safari,* and two Canadian publications *WunderKeys* and *Let's Begin*. The selected method books represent the current reading approaches: multi-key, intervallic, eclectic and middle C (see Table 3.4). Using the analytic tool, I examine the selected methods for forty-one specific elements grouped under the headings of music reading concepts, book design, teacher support, and student activities. The findings from the analysis of each element are described below:

Reinforcement of Concepts

The reinforcement of concepts is an important component in the learning process. For example, in order for a beginner student to retain and accurately recognize a new note, multiple opportunities for review are required, typically through the inclusion of two or more pieces addressing the same concept, along with ongoing note recognition activities. Most of the books examined include one or two review pieces for each new concept. However, *Piano Discoveries, Teaching Little Fingers to Play Piano, John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course* and *Piano Pronto* do not provide any review pieces with new concepts, while *David Carr Glover* includes a limited number of review pieces in the latter portion of the book.

One New Concept Presented per Piece

Another important consideration in the introduction of new concepts is ensuring that they are presented individually in order to avoid overwhelming the student with an excessive amount of

information at one time. Only four method books consistently present a single new concept per piece throughout the entirety of the book: *Helen Marlais' Succeeding at the Piano*, *The Music Tree*, *Pianokids*, and *John W. Schaum Piano Course*. By contrast, most method books introduce multiple related concepts simultaneously, such as two or more rhythmic values (e.g., quarter notes and half notes) or multiple dynamic markings (e.g., *forte* and *piano*), before later transitioning to a one concept per piece format. The concurrent introduction of quarter notes and half notes within the same lesson is common practice, as is the simultaneous presentation of the treble and bass clefs.

Inclusion of Pre-Staff Staff Notation

As one would surmise, all but one of the intervallic and eclectic approaches include pieces with pre-staff notation. The eclectic method *WunderKeys* does not contain any pre-staff notation. Surprisingly, one middle C method, *The ABC of Piano Playing*, has two short pieces with a type of pre-staff notation which is unusual for this reading approach. Two of the three multi-key methods also include pre-staff notation: *Bastien Piano Basics* and *Piano Town*.

Inclusion of Partial-Staff Notation

Two intervallic methods, *The Music Tree* and *Piano Discoveries* include partial staff notation along with 1 eclectic method, *WunderKeys*. The other methods immediately move into a middle C approach or introduce a five-line staff. The multi-key and middle C methods contain no pieces with partial-staff notation, despite this being customary in these reading approaches.

Use of Pieces on Black Keys

Intervallic and eclectic methods emphasize directional reading, and the earliest pieces often employ only the black keys to reinforce pattern and contour based reading before introducing

notation on the staff. As expected, all of the eclectic methods include black key pieces, along with two intervallic methods, *The Music Tree* and *Piano Safari* include this reading feature. *Bastien Piano Basics* and *Piano Town*, both multi-key methods incorporate pieces on the black keys and surprisingly one middle C method, *The ABC of Piano Playing* contains two pieces exploring groups of 2 and 3 black keys which is atypical of this reading approach.

Presentation of Reading by Direction/Pattern

Within intervallic and eclectic methods, music reading is expected to be introduced through directional relationships (step, skip, and repeat), supported by instructions or diagrams that provide students with a visual representation of these reading patterns. Three intervallic books meet this expectation: *The Music Tree*, *Celebrate Piano*, and *Piano Discoveries*. *Piano Safari* includes a short exercise for 2nds and 3rds but does not provide explanation or diagrams. Two multi-key books introduce directional reading, *Bastien Piano Basics* and *Piano Town*. Of the eclectic methods, *WunderKeys* and *Let's Begin*, omit information regarding reading by contour. Three middle C books contain information on directional reading, *Teaching Little Fingers to Play Piano, David Carr Glover Method*, and *The ABC of Piano Playing*; this is not a usual feature of this reading approach.

Introduction of the Music Alphabet

In general, across all method books, the music alphabet is introduced either in its entirety with a full keyboard diagram, on a partial keyboard with letter names printed on each key, or simply as a sequence of letter names ABCDEFG. Two books do not provide any information about the music alphabet by diagram or letters: *Teaching Little Fingers to Play the Piano* and *Pianokids*, while *The ABC of Piano Playing* includes a diagram of a labeled keyboard in the references pages

at the beginning of the book but not as part of the lessons for the student. Ten books provide written activities in the lesson book were the student locates individual notes or groupings of notes (CDE and FGAB) on a keyboard: *Bastien Piano Basics, The Music Tree, Piano Discoveries, Alfred's Basic Piano Library, Celebrate Piano, Helen Marlais' Succeeding at the Piano, Beanstalk's Basics, Piano Safari, WunderKeys, John W. Schaum Piano Course,* and *Piano Pronto*.

Presentation of Keyboard Notes

When introducing pieces using the notes of the keyboard without staff reading, the method books follow the expectations of their respective reading approaches. None of the middle C method books provide pieces with keyboard notes which is typical for this approach however, three methods include information regarding keyboard notes such as their relation to the black keys or their relation to the staff. All the eclectic methods and 1 multi-key method (*Piano Town*) contain pieces with keyboard notes using pre-staff notation, presenting the full music alphabet starting from CDE followed by FGAB or by presenting middle C position with CDE in the right hand followed by ABC with left hand. The two remaining multi-key methods, *Music for Piano* and *Bastien Piano Basics* present all the notes of C position at once using pre-staff notation. The intervallic methods also use pre-staff notation for keyboard pieces to reinforce intervallic reading. In *The Music Tree*, keyboard pieces are introduced with the left hand playing a lower note followed by the right hand playing a higher note, enabling students to read and play by directional movement. In contrast, *Piano Discoveries* begins by providing students with a starting note for the right hand, after which they continue by applying directional reading. *Celebrate Piano* and *Piano Safari* both present keyboard pieces with pre-staff notation in sections with CDE followed by FGAB.

Presentation of Rhythm Order

Most of the method books introduce rhythm notes in a logical order where quarter notes and half notes comes first, followed by whole notes and dotted half notes. Generally, note values are presented gradually in all the eclectic books. In the multi-key methods, the presentation of musical concepts progresses at a noticeably faster pace than in the eclectic approaches, with quarter notes, half notes, whole notes, and dotted-half notes all introduced before page 20 of each book. *Leila Fletcher, Teaching Little Fingers to Play Piano,* and *Piano Pronto* include all note values on one page, but then formally introduce them again throughout the book. Typically, the multi-key and middle C methods incorporate more note values than the eclectic methods, including eighth notes, dotted quarter notes and all rest values. *Piano Discoveries* presents rhythm in an unusual manner on page 6, using black "short" clusters and white "long" clusters to represent quarter notes and half notes, respectively. Table 4.3 outlines the included note values for each primer level of the method books. This comparison underscores the differences in the presentation of note values among the methods, with the multi-key and middle C approaches introducing a wider range of note and rest values than the intervallic and eclectic methods.

Table 4.3: Chart of included note values

	𝅗𝅥	𝅗𝅥	𝅗𝅥.	𝅝	𝅗𝅥.	♫	♪	𝄽	𝄻	𝄼
MULTI-KEY METHODS										
Music for Piano	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Bastien Piano Basics	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X
Piano Town	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X
INTERVALLIC METHODS										
The Music Tree	X	X	X	X						
Piano Discoveries	X	X	X	X				X	X	X
Celebrate Piano	X	X	X	X						
Piano Safari	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X

	♩	𝅗𝅥	♩.	𝅝	♩.	♫	♪	𝄽	𝄻	𝄼
ECLECTIC METHODS										
Piano Adventures	X	X	X	X				X		
Alfred's Premier Piano Course	X	X	X	X				X	X	X
Alfred's Basic Piano Library	X	X	X	X						
Hal Leonard Student Library	X	X	X	X				X	X	
Helen Marlais' Succeeding at the Piano	X	X	X	X						
Beanstalk's Basics	X	X	X	X				X	X	X
WunderKeys	X	X	X	X						
Let's Begin	X	X	X	X						
MIDDLE C METHODS										
Leila Fletcher	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X
Teaching Little Fingers to Play Piano	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X
John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course	X	X	X	X				X	X	X
Pianokids	X	X		X						
John W. Schaum Piano Course	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X
David Carr Glover Method	X	X	X	X						
Piano Pronto	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
The ABC of Piano Playing	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X

Presentation of Note Order

The presentation of note order reflects the reading approach of each method. For the multi-key methods, the staff note order is presented by position: first in the treble or bass staff then the alternate staff, followed by the grand staff. The intervallic method *The Music Tree* and eclectic method *Celebrate Piano* both incorporate a pure intervallic presentation of notes. *The Music Tree* begins with a starting note on the staff then students read by interval up or down while *Celebrate Piano* uses a starting letter on the staff (for example the letter F on the first space of the treble staff), then students read by interval up or down. *Piano Discoveries*, an intervallic method, has an unusual presentation of note order which begins with treble C and A along with bass C and D (spaces 3 and 2 of each staff). The final intervallic method, *Piano Safari*, introduces note order by beginning with three notes on the treble staff (G–A–B), followed by three notes on

the bass staff (C–B–A). Eclectic methods typically begin with middle C and then progress to additional landmark notes. From there, students are introduced to notes expanding outward from the C position, most often C–D–E in the treble staff and C–B–A in the bass staff.

Middle C based methods likewise present material beginning in the middle C position, introducing three notes on the treble staff and then three on the bass staff, closely paralleling the sequence used in eclectic approaches, until the full position has been established. In contrast, the *Leila Fletcher* series presents all notes of the middle C position within a single piece.

Presentation of Interval Order

It is surprising to find the mention of intervals in multi-key methods *Bastien Piano Basics* and *Piano Town* since multi-key methods usually focus on positional playing rather than interval relationships. Both discuss intervals and contain pieces using 2nds, 3rds, 4ths and 5ths after middle C and C position are introduced. All intervallic methods mention and use intervals extensively in guiding students through note reading. *Celebrate Piano* and *Piano Safari* discuss intervals and use intervallic reading starting with 2nds and 3rds. As one would expect, no middle C methods mention intervals as these methods concentrate on middle C position and do not focus on interval relationships. Like middle C methods, no eclectic methods mention intervals and generally work from a shared middle C position.

Use of Landmark Notes (Middle C, Treble G and Bass F)

One multi-key method, *Piano Town*, employs landmark notes for only one treble staff piece and one bass staff piece. Two intervallic methods include non-traditional landmark notes; *Piano Discoveries* designates bass C, middle C and treble C as the landmarks, while *Piano Safari* relies on treble G and bass C. *The Music Tree* (intervallic approach) and some eclectic methods begin

with middle C then introduce landmark notes (middle C, treble G, and bass F): *Piano Adventures, Alfred's Premier Piano Course, Alfred's Basic Piano Library* (uses bass F and treble G, but does not employ the word "landmark"), *Hal Leonard Student Library* (F and G only), *Helen Marlais' Succeeding at the Piano* (treble G and bass F only), *Piano Safari* (treble G and bass C only), and *Let's Begin* (which introduces the three guide notes without labeling them as landmarks). *WunderKeys, Beanstalk's Basics*, and *Celebrate Piano* omit landmark notes in the primer/first book.

Pieces with Note Names Written In Some or All Notes

Nine books exclude written note names for notes in any pieces: *Music for Piano, Piano Discoveries, Celebrate Piano, Piano Safari, Teaching Little Fingers to Play Piano, John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course, Pianokids, John W. Schaum Piano Course,* and *David Carr Glover Method*. One method, *Piano Pronto*, includes written note names for every pitch in every piece, whereas the *Leila Fletcher* series provides written note names only once, in a single piece on page nine. *The Music Tree* adds the note name of the starting note written beside the note rather than in the note and only for some pieces. Several books include note names written in for pre-staff notation with white key pieces: *Bastien Piano Basics, Piano Town, Piano Adventures, Alfred's Premier Piano Course, Alfred's Basic Piano Library, Hal Leonard Student Library, Helen Marlais' Succeeding at the Piano, Beanstalk's Basics, WunderKeys*, and *Let's Begin*. Six methods have notes written in for some of the pieces on the staff: *Bastein Basic Piano Library, Piano Town, Alfred's Basic Piano Library, Hal Leonard Student Library, Beanstalk's Basics*, and *The ABC of Piano Playing*.

Grand Staff Introduced at Once or Each Clef Separately

Ten methods introduce the grand staff all at once: *Music for Piano* (multi-key method), *Piano Discoveries* (intervallic method), *Piano Adventures* (eclectic method), *Helen Marlais' Succeeding at the Piano* (eclectic), and the 6 middle C methods *Leila Fletcher, Teaching Little Fingers to Play Piano, John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course, John W. Schaum Piano Course, David Carr Glover Method*, and *Piano Pronto*. *Celebrate Piano* gradually presents the grand staff over the course of the book. The other methods first present each staff separately followed by the grand staff.

Gradual Progression from Stepwise Motion to Skips

Although the majority of the books begin with pieces in stepwise motion then afterwards introduce skips, seven books include steps and skips at the same time: *Music for Piano* (multi-key), *Leila Fletcher*, *Teaching Little Fingers to Play Piano, John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course, John W. Schaum Piano Course*, and *Piano Pronto* (middle C methods). *Let's Begin* introduces steps and skips simultaneously for the white key pieces. Two eclectic methods, *Alfred's Basic Piano Library* and *WunderKeys* only include pieces with stepwise motion.

Pieces in C Position

For the vast majority of methods, the pieces remain in middle C position, C position, or both. Three intervallic methods, *The Music Tree, Piano Discoveries*, and *Celebrate Piano* have no fixed position for any pieces which ensures that students are reading by direction and not associating finger numbers to specific notes. *Piano Safari* (intervallic method) contains pieces in LH bass C position and RH treble G position.

Pieces in G Position

All multi-key methods incorporate pieces in G position; however, this is not the case for intervallic or eclectic approaches. Among the middle-C methods, the *Leila Fletcher Piano Course* and the *David Carr Glover Method* include a limited number of pieces in G position, whereas *Teaching Little Fingers to Play Piano* and *The ABC of Piano Playing* present pieces in which the hand position departs from middle C or C position without a formal introduction of the G position.

Fingering Supplied for Essential Notes or for Many Notes

Method books frequently provide fingering for every note in pieces written on both black keys and white keys and subsequently offer fingering only for the initial note and other essential notes in staff-reading pieces. Several methods supply complete fingering for all notes in black-key pieces or in the earliest white-key pieces; these include *Bastien Piano Basics*, *Piano Town*, *Alfred's Basic Piano Library*, Helen Marlais' *Succeeding at the Piano*, *Beanstalk's Piano Basics*, *WunderKeys*, and the *Leila Fletcher Piano Course*. *Let's Begin* likewise provides fingering for all notes, whereas *The ABC of Piano Playing* omits fingering in many pieces written in middle-C position, though it does indicate the starting note and essential fingerings in selected pieces.

Introduction of Bar Line, Double Bar Line, Repeat Sign

All intervallic methods introduce the bar line, measure, and double bar line, with *Celebrate Piano* and *Piano Safari* additionally presenting the repeat sign. The multi-key methods show greater variation: *Music for Piano* employs bar lines but does not provide a formal explanation of them, and *Bastien Piano Basics* is the only multi-key method that explicitly introduces measures. The

eclectic approaches generally include the bar line, measure, double bar line, and repeat sign; however, *Let's Begin* is an exception, as it does not introduce the repeat sign.

Includes Aural Skills and Activities

Aural skills instruction is absent from the majority of the methods surveyed. Notably, three intervallic approaches, *The Music Tree*, *Piano Safari*, and *Celebrate Piano*, incorporate aural activities. *The Music Tree* includes questions prompting students to listen for dynamic contrasts and to distinguish between higher and lower sounds. *Piano Safari* integrates extensive aural engagement through its combined rote learning and reading approach, resulting in a substantial aural component throughout the book. *Celebrate Piano* likewise offers numerous aural activities, including clap-backs, play-backs, and a listening task titled "You Be the Judge."

Among the eclectic approaches, only two methods, *WunderKeys* and *Let's Begin*, include listening activities such as identifying dynamics, clap-backs, play-backs, and listening games. Within the middle C approaches, the *Leila Fletcher Piano Course* and *Teaching Little Fingers to Play the Piano* both introduce rote playing at the beginning of each book. *Pianokids* contains a single listening activity, while the *David Carr Glover Method* provides a small number of listening tasks. No multi-key methods include aural skills instruction or related activities.

Includes Composition and/or Improvising Activities

The majority of method books do not include composition or improvisation activities, which is unsurprising given that such tasks are rarely incorporated into primary lesson books and, when present within a series, are typically relegated to supplementary volumes. Three intervallic methods, *The Music Tree*, *Piano Discoveries*, and *Celebrate Piano*, provide composition activities, as do two eclectic approaches: *Piano Adventures* and the *Hal Leonard Student Library*, the latter

offering a single composition task. *Let's Begin* includes one improvisation activity, while *Piano Safari* integrates improvisation extensively throughout the book. No middle C methods incorporate composition or improvisation activities.

Includes Transposition Activities

Only one multi-key method book, *Music for Piano*, contains transposition which is surprising considering the position-based approach to this reading method lends itself easily to this type of activity. Three intervallic methods, *The Music Tree, Celebrate Piano* and *Piano Safari* include transposition exercises which suits this reading approach. Most eclectic methods omit transposing activities, but the concept appears in *Piano Adventures*, and *Let's Begin,* which includes 1 transposition activity. The middle C books do not offer transposing exercises except for *The ABC of Piano Playing* which leads the student in transposing a few pieces from white keys to black keys.

Includes Accidentals

Accidentals are absent in all primer level intervallic methods, eclectic methods, and 2 middle C methods: *John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course* and P*ianokids*. The multi-key and the majority of middle C methods include sharp, flat, or both (see Table 4.5).

Introduction of Key Signatures

Few method books focus on key signatures. This concept is found in one multi-key book, *Music for Piano* (G+, F+, D+, F#+, E+, D flat+) and three middle C books: *Leila Fletcher Piano Course* (G+ and F+), *Teaching Little Fingers to Play Piano* (G+, F+), and *John W. Schaum Piano Course* (G+).

Introduction of Time Signatures

All multi-key methods introduce the 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4 time signatures. Among the intervallic approaches, *The Music Tree* presents 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, 5/4, and 6/4, whereas *Piano Discoveries* addresses only 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4, and *Piano Safari* employs solely 3/4 and 4/4. *Celebrate Piano* does not introduce time signatures. All eclectic methods include 4/4 and 3/4; additionally, *Beanstalk's Basics Piano Course* and *Let's Begin* also introduce 2/4. Similarly, most middle C methods present 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4, with the exception of *Teaching Little Fingers to Play Piano*, which also includes 5/4. *Piano Pronto* omits 2/4, and *Pianokids* introduces only 4/4.

Introduction of Dynamic Signs

All multi-key, intervallic, eclectic, and 2 middle C books (*David Carr Glover Method* and *The ABC of Piano Playing*) introduce various dynamic signs (see Table 4.5), while *Let's begin* (eclectic) and the remainder of middle C books omit dynamic signs.

Introduction of Articulation and Other Music Signs

Musical markings such as staccato, tie, octave, etc. vary greatly among the methods. The use of slur, staccato, and tie are most prevalent with tempo markings and octave signs well represented among the methods. Four eclectic books (*Alfred's Premier Piano Course, Alfred's Basic Piano Library, WunderKeys* and *Let's Begin*) and one middle C book (*Pianokids*) do not include any extra markings (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Chart of Dynamics and Other Music Signs

	#	♭	p	f	pp	ff	mp	mf	cres	decres	slur	stacc.	tie	8va
MULTI-KEY METHODS														
Music for Piano	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Bastien Piano Basics	x	x	x	x							x	x	x	
Piano Town	x	x	x	x							x	x	x	

	#	♭	p	f	pp	ff	mp	mf	cres	decres	slur	stacc.	tie	8va
INTERVALLIC METHODS														
The Music Tree			x	x							x			x
Piano Discoveries			x	x								x	x	
Celebrate Piano			x	x										
Piano Safari			x	x			x	x			x			x
ECLECTIC METHODS														
Piano Adventures			x	x				x					x	
Alfred's Premier Piano Course			x	x				x						
Alfred's Basic Piano Library			x	x				x						
Hal Leonard Student Library			x	x			x	x					x	
Helen Marlais' Succeeding at the Piano			x	x									x	x
Beanstalk's Basics			x	x	x						x			
WunderKeys			x	x										
Let's Begin														
MIDDLE C METHODS														
Leila Fletcher	x	x									x	x	x	x
Teaching Little Fingers to Play Piano	x	x									x		x	x
John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course													x	
Pianokids														
John W. Schaum Piano Course	x	x										x	x	
David Carr Glover Method	x	x									x	x	x	
Piano Pronto		x											x	
The ABC of Piano Playing	x		x	x	x	x					x	x		

Book Design

Book design plays a role in the ease of music reading. Jacobson (2016) recommends that beginner method books contain large notation and text fonts and are designed in a landscape format so children can see the pieces easily. The books in the study are all in landscape format except for two in portrait format: *WunderKeys* and *Piano Pronto*. All method books use large font for notation, and the majority of the books also include medium to large font sizes for lyrics, instructions or explanations. Comeau (2014) conducted a study on illustrations in beginner

method books which found that colourful, large illustrations are distracting to the student. Instead of focusing on reading the music, the student's attention is divided between the music and the illustrations. Most methods selected for the study include illustrations, diagrams, or both. Two books omitted illustrations (*Music for Piano* and *Piano Pronto*) while six books contained large, colourful illustrations (*Bastien Piano Basics, Piano Town, Celebrate Piano, Alfred's Basic Piano Library, WunderKeys* and *Teaching Little Fingers to Play Piano*). Five books provide only black and white illustrations (*Piano Discoveries, Piano Safari, Beanstalk's Basics Piano Course, Let's Begin, Leila Fletcher Piano Course*, and *The ABC of Piano Playing*). The other books offer small to medium-sized diagrams, and explanatory diagrams were present in all method books.

Teacher Support

Teachers rely on beginner piano method books to supply an organized, progressive curriculum for presenting music reading and other musical concepts. Since most piano pedagogy texts lack music reading information, one could assume that the piano method book fills the role of guiding the teacher through music reading instruction. Therefore, having access to teacher resources for method books is vital to inform the teacher on the most effective way to use the method and to provide answers to common questions or offer teacher support. Eleven books provide a teacher manual or an online manual (see Table 4.5). Six methods present online teacher resources ranging from online teacher guides to instructional videos, free printable worksheets and games, or social media groups. Two methods offer paid subscriptions for teacher resources and support: *Piano Adventures* through their Atlas subscription and *Piano Safari* through the Piano Safari Institute.

Table 4.5: Chart of Included Teacher Resources

	Manual	Online Res.	Paid resources
MULTI-KEY METHODS			
Music for Piano	x	x	
Bastien Piano Basics			
Piano Town	x		
INTERVALLIC METHODS			
The Music Tree	x		
Piano Discoveries	x		
Celebrate Piano	x		
Piano Safari	x	x	x
ECLECTIC METHODS			
Piano Adventures	x	x	x
Alfred's Premier Piano Course		x	
Alfred's Basic Piano Library	x		
Hal Leonard Student Library	x		
Helen Marlais' Succeeding at the Piano	x		
Beanstalk's Basics			
WunderKeys		x	x
Let's Begin			
MIDDLE C METHODS			
Leila Fletcher			
Teaching Little Fingers to Play Piano			
John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course			
Pianokids			
John W. Schaum Piano Course			
David Carr Glover Method	x		
Piano Pronto		x	
The ABC of Piano Playing			

Directions to the Teacher

Only seven method books provide instructional guidance for the teacher within the lesson book itself: *Bastien Piano Basics*, *Piano Safari*, *Piano Adventures*, *Helen Marlais' Succeeding at the Piano*, *Let's Begin*, the *Leila Fletcher Piano Course*, and the *John W. Schaum Piano Course*. These

instructions, however, are typically sparse, appearing either intermittently throughout the book or as a brief "Note to the Teacher" at the beginning. Such guidance is important, as it clarifies the intended use of the method and offers support for enhancing instruction and assisting students. In the absence of clear instructional direction, teachers may experience frustration and ultimately discontinue use of the method.

Includes Duet Parts and/or Backing Tracks

Music reading and rhythm skills can be strengthened through the use of teacher–student duets or by having students play along with backing tracks. Ten methods include teacher-duet parts for all or most pieces, while seven provide duet parts for only some selections. Five methods omit teacher-duet parts entirely, and one method offers a separate teacher-duet book available for purchase (see Table 4.7). As with duets, backing tracks serve as a valuable pedagogical resource. They can create a more satisfying performance experience, offer an engaging activity during lessons, and enhance the student's enjoyment of home practice. Backing tracks are available for thirteen methods, either for purchase, online access, or on an accompaniment CD. One method provides backing tracks for only a portion of its repertoire, and eight methods do not include backing tracks (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6: Chart of Included Accompaniments

	Teacher Duets for All/Most Pieces	Teacher Duets for Some Pieces	Backing Tracks for All/Most Pieces	Backing Tracks for Some Pieces
MULTI-KEY METHODS				
Music for Piano		x		
Bastien Piano Basics		x		x
Piano Town	x		x	
INTERVALLIC METHODS				
The Music Tree	x		x	
Piano Discoveries		x	x (paid)	

	Teacher Duets for All/Most Pieces	Teacher Duets for Some Pieces	Backing Tracks for All/Most Pieces	Backing Tracks for Some Pieces
Celebrate Piano	x		x	
Piano Safari	x		x	
ECLECTIC METHODS				
Piano Adventures	x		x (paid)	
Alfred's Premier Piano Course	x			x
Alfred's Basic Piano Library	x		x	
Hal Leonard Student Library	x		x	
Helen Marlais' Succeeding at the Piano	x		x	
Beanstalk's Basics	x		x	
WunderKeys		x		
Let's Begin		x		x
MIDDLE C METHODS				
Leila Fletcher		x	x	
Teaching Little Fingers to Play Piano				
John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course	x		x	
Pianokids				
John W. Schaum Piano Course				
David Carr Glover Method				
Piano Pronto	x (separate book)			
The ABC of Piano Playing				

Instructions for the Student

Instructions directed toward students serve an important role by reinforcing practice steps, supporting directional reading, and clarifying hand position, among other skills. Every method book except the *Hal Leonard Student Library* provides such student-focused guidance. This feature is particularly valuable, as many students practice independently at home without the assistance of a parent or other adult. These instructions appear in various forms, including questions, explanatory notes, character-based guidance within units, helpful hints, and prompts that lead students to examine a piece before performing it.

Provides Practice Directions

Practice directions are highly beneficial for students who require reminders about effective practice strategies, who practice independently without adult assistance, or who have not been given explicit practice instructions by their teacher. *Piano Safari*, the *Hal Leonard Student Library*, *Let's Begin*, the *Leila Fletcher Piano Course*, *Teaching Little Fingers to Play the Piano*, and *John Thompson's Easiest Piano Method* do not provide practice directions for students. The remaining seventeen books include practice guidance in some form. In several cases, the directions are detailed and presented as step-by-step instructions; in others, practice suggestions appear only intermittently throughout the book.

Overall, most method books could offer more thorough and consistent practice support. Only six methods provide comprehensive, sequential practice directions: *The Music Tree*, *Piano Discoveries*, *Celebrate Piano*, *Alfred's Premier Piano Course*, *Alfred's Basic Piano Library*, and *Helen Marlais' Succeeding at the Piano*. Three books present practice instructions on a single page but do not reiterate them elsewhere: *Piano Adventures*, the *John W. Schaum Piano Course*, and the *David Carr Glover Method*. Young students benefit from repeated reminders and checklists that guide their practice throughout the lesson book, and parents without musical training rely on such directions to support practice at home.

Includes Written Components to Reinforce Music Reading

Fifteen method books reinforce note reading skills through written assignments in the first lesson book. These include *Music for Piano*, *Bastien Piano Basics*, *Piano Town*, *The Music Tree*, *Piano Discoveries*, *Celebrate Piano*, *Piano Safari*, *Piano Adventures*, *Alfred's Premier Piano Course*, *Helen Marlais' Succeeding at the Piano*, *WunderKeys*, *Let's Begin*, *John Thompson's Easiest Piano*

Course, *Piano Pronto*, and *The ABC of Piano Playing*. Most of these books provide a limited number of short written exercises such as naming notes, identifying line and space notes, reviewing unit concepts, or completing brief writing tasks, to reinforce new material introduced in the unit, in addition to note reading.

However, if a teacher does not utilize the written components in the method, incorporate a supplementary theory book or additional worksheets, or relies solely on the lesson book for written reinforcement, students may not receive sufficient review which assists in solidifying their understanding. The written activities included in the lesson books alone are generally inadequate to provide the level of reinforcement necessary for developing strong music reading skills.

Summary

The analysis reveals substantial differences among beginner piano method books in how music reading and foundational concepts are introduced, reinforced, and supported. While all methods aim to establish basic musical literacy, their approaches vary widely depending on reading philosophy: multi-key, intervallic, eclectic, and middle C approaches. Overall, no single method consistently addresses all elements considered essential for effective beginner instruction.

4.4 Findings of the Piano Teacher Survey

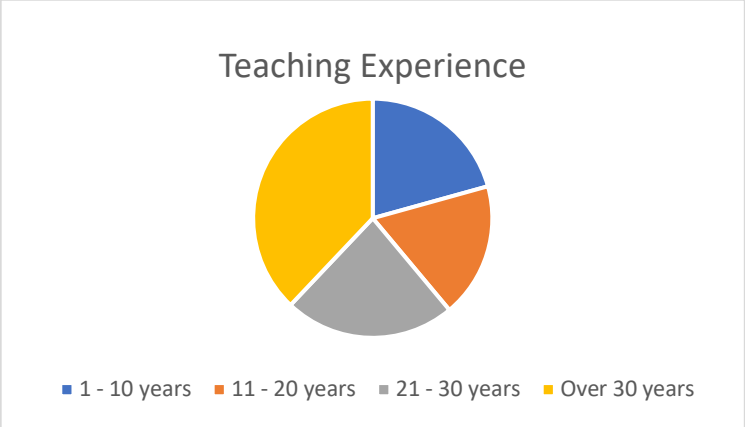
Although an examination of both pedagogy textbooks and method books reveals notable deficiencies in the available resources, the findings of a teacher survey further substantiate these concerns. An online survey administered through SurveyMonkey was distributed to teachers across Canada via Facebook, Registered Music Teachers' Associations, and email. The survey included questions related to participant demographics, the presentation of music reading skills

in beginner piano method books, and the incorporation of sight reading. Its purpose was to gain a clearer understanding of the criteria teachers use when selecting method books, their perceptions of each method's strengths and weaknesses, their overall satisfaction with the presentation of musical concepts, and the ways in which sight reading is integrated into lesson time.

Demographic Results

Two hundred and forty-seven unique respondents completed the survey with an average of 200 responses per question. Most of the participants were teaching beginners in a private lesson setting (70%) and had over twenty years or more teaching experience (see Table 4.7). This is significant since this indicates that the participating teachers would likely possess a deep knowledge of one or several method books, and extensive teaching experience with a variety of beginner piano students between the ages of six to nine.

Table 4.7: Chart of Teaching Experience



Music Reading Results

A list of ten method books was provided, along with an "other" category in which teachers could identify additional series or offer more detailed comments. Twenty-four teachers indicated that they use multiple methods depending on a student's age or level of readiness. This number is likely higher, as the focus group discussions also revealed that teachers frequently employ more than one method book for their students, as noted earlier. It is also possible that some respondents selected only the method they were currently using and did not report all materials in regular use.

The data indicate that teachers predominantly select contemporary methods, those published within the last thirty years, rather than long-standing series first issued in the mid-twentieth century. Teachers also tend to favor the eclectic approach (methods that begin with pre-notation or partial-staff notation, introduce staff reading from middle C, employ guide notes, and progress from smaller to larger intervals) over the middle-C approach (methods that begin with staff reading from the first lesson and introduce notes from middle C in a shared C position) or the multi-key approach (methods that teach reading in various hand positions such as middle-C position or G position) (see Table 4.8). According to the survey responses, 67% of teachers use eclectic methods, 10% use intervallic methods, 7% use middle-C methods, and 5% use multi-key methods.

Table 4.8: List of Method Book Responses

Method Book	Total Responses
John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course (middle C)	0
PianoKids (middle C)	1

Method Book	Total Responses
Leila Fletcher Piano Course (middle C)	2
The Music Tree (intervallic)	2
David Carr Glover (middle C)	2
Celebrate Piano (intervallic)	3
Hal Leonard Piano Student Library (eclectic)	3
The ABC of Piano Playing by Berlin (middle C)	3
Let's Begin by Wanless (eclectic)	3
Own Method	4
Piano Pronto (middle C)	4
Music Moves for Piano (intervallic)	4
Bastien Piano Basics (multi-key)	8
Piano Safari (intervallic)	8
Alfred's Premier Piano Course (eclectic)	11
Multiple Methods	24
WunderKeys (eclectic)	28
Piano Adventures (eclectic)	64

Teachers were asked to identify the aspects of their chosen method book they found most appealing. Eight elements were provided, along with an "other" category, and respondents were permitted to select up to three. The elements most frequently selected were the sequencing of concepts and the reading approach. This finding is unsurprising, as method books function as the primary curriculum for beginning students and serve as the central resource for developing music reading skills. As the survey results indicate, teachers rely on method books for logical progression, clear organization, and effective presentation of musical concepts.

The quality of the repertoire, as well as creative components such as composition activities, improvisation, and teacher–student duets, were also selected at notable rates. These responses suggest that teachers value materials that engage students through appealing pieces, ensemble opportunities, and additional musical activities that enrich the learning experience and support the development of broader musicianship skills (see Table 4.9).

Table 4.9: List of Most Liked Elements of a Method Book

Most Liked Elements of a Method Book	
Sequencing of new concepts	158
Reading approach	149
Quality of the pieces	82
Creative elements	80
Teacher duets	71
Illustrations and diagrams	50
Design of the book	42
Use of diagrams	22
Ear and rote activities*	8
Supplementary games*	5
Backing tracks*	4

*elements listed in the 'other' category

When asked what aspects of their current method book required the most improvement, teachers were invited to provide open-ended responses. Of the 129 participants who replied, 21 indicated satisfaction with their method book, 88 offered specific suggestions for improvement, 20 provided comments unrelated to the question, and 118 chose not to respond. The most frequently cited concern related to the quality of the repertoire. Many teachers described the

pieces in their current method book as “bland” or “uninteresting,” noting that they often fail to engage students who prefer video-game music or contemporary musical idioms. To address this gap, teachers reported supplementing the method with repertoire that better reflects their students’ tastes and musical sensibilities. Several respondents also observed that the repertoire in some methods does not reflect current cultural and societal values, with a few specifically noting that U.S. published methods lack cultural diversity.

Other commonly mentioned areas for improvement included the need for greater reinforcement of concepts and more appropriate pacing. Teachers commented that the progression of material in their method book was either too slow or too rapid, and several emphasized the need for additional pieces or repeated exposure to concepts before advancing. Additional suggestions included expanded ear training and improvisation activities, a wider variety of rhythmic patterns, repertoire that moves beyond fixed hand positions, and updated illustrations.

A number of teachers remarked that they use different method books for different students because no single resource adequately meets the needs of all learners. One participant noted, “I don’t think there is a ‘perfect’ book out there for each student. It is up to the teacher to pull from different methods and aids in order to help the student learn. I only use the book as a source of pieces and general guide.” Another echoed this sentiment: “There will always be something missing from any set of method books; therefore, I supplement with other method books according to students’ needs.” A third respondent added, “No one method works perfectly for all students, so I pick and choose what I want to do. Consequently, I don’t believe that improving any one book would make it perfect for all learners.” These comments align with

the focus group findings, in which teachers similarly described drawing from multiple resources to meet individual student needs. Teachers also emphasized that the "development of music reading ability" is a central component of beginner piano instruction. Many reported spending five to ten minutes of each lesson on music reading activities away from the piano. Teachers expressed strong agreement that beginner method books are essential tools for teaching music reading and indicated satisfaction with how their current method presents these skills.

When asked to rate the importance of developing music reading ability relative to other skills (e.g., rhythm training, ear training, technique) on a six-point scale, the average rating was 4.8. Forty percent of respondents rated music reading development as important, and 20% identified it as the most important skill. Thus, 60% of teachers agree that cultivating proficient music reading skills is a significant element of beginner piano lessons. Fifty percent of teachers reported spending one to five minutes reinforcing music reading away from the piano, while 37% devoted six to ten minutes to off-bench activities such as note review games or worksheets. These findings suggest that teachers value music reading instruction and employ multiple strategies to reinforce it.

Overall, teachers consider beginner piano method books to be an important resource for teaching music reading, assigning them an average importance rating of 5.1 on a six-point scale (1 = not important, 6 = very important). They also expressed satisfaction with their current method books, again with an average rating of 5.1. Furthermore, respondents indicated that they were pleased with the presentation of music reading concepts in their chosen methods. Taken together, the survey results reveal that although teachers are generally satisfied with beginner piano method books and recognize their value, they also acknowledge the need to

supplement these resources and adapt their use to accommodate individual students' needs and musical preferences.

Sight Reading Results

The majority of surveyed teachers (80%) reported incorporating sight reading into lessons with beginner students, typically devoting approximately one to five minutes to sight reading activities. Of the sight reading resources listed in the survey, 63 teachers indicated that they do not use a dedicated sight reading book during lessons. This is because many teachers rely on the method book itself as a source of sight reading material, often using new or upcoming pieces for this purpose. Both the survey results and the focus group discussions support the view that the lesson book serves as the primary sight reading resource for beginners.

Other teachers reported using sight reading supplements associated with their chosen method series or employing the *Four Star Sight Reading* series. Several respondents noted that they draw on pieces from other books, create their own sight reading materials, or use flashcards. Given the increasing availability of digital tools and the widespread use of tablets in music education, it is noteworthy that very few surveyed teachers reported using apps for sight reading.

Summary

The survey identified music reading instruction as a significant component of beginner piano pedagogy, with the majority of teachers rating its importance highly and dedicating lesson time to its reinforcement. Similarly, most teachers reported incorporating sight reading into their lessons, although this is often done informally through the method book rather than through dedicated sight reading materials. The survey findings suggest that while beginner piano method

books play a central role in supporting music reading development, teachers employ a flexible, student-centered approach that extends beyond any single published resource.

4.5 Focus Groups

Piano Teacher Focus Groups

Four focus groups were conducted over Zoom with teachers of beginner piano students. In total, thirteen teachers participated across the four groups. Eight held university degrees in music or music-related fields, while the remaining five had musical training ranging from Conservatory Grade Eight piano to the Associate level. Two of the focus groups consisted of independent studio teachers who provide private lessons, and the other two were composed of MYC® teachers who teach both group and private lessons. The MYC® teachers were recruited directly by email, whereas the independent teachers were randomly selected from survey respondents who had provided their contact information. Both groups were asked identical questions regarding music reading instruction, while the MYC® groups were also asked additional questions related to CoMP. Despite differences in teaching contexts (private versus groups settings), the discussions revealed strikingly similar perspectives on teaching beginners, strategies for developing music reading skills, and approaches to sight reading.

The discussion on beginner method books resulted in comparable responses among all the focus groups, especially among the independent teachers. Many teachers commented on their use of multiple method books over their career and their experiences with different method books with students. They agreed that there is not one method that "does it all" but are content to use multiple methods or supplement with other material. One teacher remarked:

Book wise, I find it would be great if there was a book that had everything. But then I remember that it's also great to close it down and get the pattern cards out and get our kids on the floor with a staff mat and put the notes how they fit on the staff. So I don't mind the versatility of having a book that does some things…I think, although it might be easier to have the full package, I think, putting it away and doing another activity, especially for these little ages, is okay.

The sentiment was reiterated later in the discussion, "So there are more books that I think, oh, this will be a good selection for you. Let's learn this piece…so I kind of use other method books modularly." The methods most frequently mentioned across all focus groups included *Piano Adventures*, the *Alfred* series, *Bastien Piano Basics*, *Piano Safari*, *The Music Tree*, and *WunderKeys* along with *My First Piano Adventures* (for very young children) and, naturally, Music for Young Children® for the two focus groups comprised of MYC® teachers. The discussions made clear that the teachers had experience with a wide range of methods and tended to gravitate toward the intervallic or eclectic approaches. Most relied primarily on the core lesson book, and in some cases, the accompanying theory book. As one teacher explained, "So I have my students buy the core books, but we can supplement with all these other books at each level, right from you know, songs that are on the radio that they have for every level to all kinds of books."

It is noteworthy that no teacher in any focus group reported using sound before sight approaches with beginners and mainly employed notation-first method books (although *Piano Safari* is the exception due to its incorporation of rote learning). One teacher reflected on this absence:

> It's interesting, because we had, none of us have said that we use the Suzuki method. When I was looking for music lessons for my child, I chose violin because the weakest link I had with my musical development was my ear, and I really liked the idea of that freedom of just being able to pick up an instrument and play it without needing any music.

This observation aligns with my own experience as a student, in which instruction was heavily notation focused, with limited ear training beyond what was required for examinations.

The topic of music reading teaching strategies generated the most extensive discussion across all four focus groups. All participating teachers agreed that multiple strategies are necessary to support students' development of music reading skills, as an approach that proves effective for one learner may not be successful for another. As one participant noted, "one size does not fit all." Another teacher elaborated on this point:

> Just overall, I think just how many different ways or different types of learners and stuff there are, that the things that I've tried with one student aren't going to work for another and it's not just one thing, it's you know, I've got about four or five different things I've tried with kids and you'll still come up with a kid that none of these things seems to work for that one.

Since there is no universally accepted method for teaching music reading, nor a single approach that guarantees music reading success for all students, teachers rely on experimentation and adaptability to identify strategies that meet individual learners' needs. One teacher explained, "…they're exploring in a different way, and I think the more you can explore a concept from different aspects of different ways the more you're going to be able to figure it out." Another teacher echoed this perspective:

> I just keep trying all the ways and I definitely have them exposed to as many different ways as possible, because they might not even know that analysis is their thing. And they're like, 'Oh, you're right. I see it's a pattern. It's here, it's here.' And then they might really click into that, or they might be really confident with singing the melody first, or there's lots of different ways they didn't realize that they were good, so finding their strengths and building on them.

Of the music reading strategies discussed, using landmark/guide notes and reading by pattern/direction recurred the most often.

The teachers discussed the use of landmark notes (bass F, middle C and treble G) as a strategy to help students orient themselves on the staff, “For starting to read, I do like to do the landmarks like, make sure they know middle C and then G is, you know, 2 lines up, 2 lines down and kind of filling that in...” The teachers also agreed that introducing one new note at a time is more effective than presenting several simultaneously, and that substantial repetition is necessary to ensure mastery of both the landmark notes and newly introduced notes or patterns:

> So you know, just breaking it down to do, like you were saying, even with your game, just working on 3 notes and spending a whole week reviewing 3 notes or 2 patterns, and just constantly going over…and trying to master just simple things also so they feel like they're accomplishing something and then just building on that.

Since the teachers in the focus groups use intervallic or eclectic methods, reading by pattern and direction was discussed as the main approach to music reading. “You know there's a lot of pattern-based reading at the beginning. So they know that, you know, if you see five notes going up, you don't necessarily even have to read every single note on the staff to know that it's going five notes up, stepping up so high and so on.” Another teacher explained:

> But yeah, getting them to zoom out and really see, you know, there's a bunch of skips here, now we're stepping. You don't have to read any every single note. Are we moving hand positions in the space? No, this is our starting hand position. So let's read it. You know you just played three, and you're stepping down in the left hand, let's play four next and stuff like that.

The use of cue words for landmark notes was also suggested. For example, teachers described phrases such as “in the bass clef house, G is in the attic” or the use of short narrative descriptions to support students’ understanding of note placement on the staff. When students struggled with guide notes, several teacher reported using acronyms for the spaces of the staff to assist note identification; however, they noted that this strategy was employed reluctantly:

> …once they get out to sort of like all the lines and spaces that's where it starts to sometimes get fuzzy for them right, and I, I personally use the acronyms when I was learning, like Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge, but I'm careful with that, because I've seen and been to a lot of workshops where they said they don't do that because kids will just get them mixed up and kids do get them mixed up. So I sort of use them with the students that it makes sense for and then for the ones that they can't remember the landmarks…

Another teacher offered a similar sentiment, "I will finally break down and give them the old 'Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge' because I'm like, you know what, maybe this student needs that, maybe that's what's going to click with them."

Other strategies discussed included the use of flashcards and games to reinforce note recognition. Flashcards were used during lessons, assigned as homework, or provided as sets for students to practice at home. Although flashcards were mentioned in three of the focus groups as a common reinforcement tool, one teacher noted an important limitation: "…the thing about flashcards is that it sometimes doesn't translate to the physical finding, you know, on the piano." Several teachers echoed this concern, observing a disconnect between students' ability to identify isolated notes and their ability to read those same notes within a piece. As one participant explained, "Some kids get really, really good at being able to say, 'That's a C, that's an A,' but then, when it comes to actually playing that note on the piano, they've lost the connection." Another teacher added, "They can name those notes with no problem off the bench, but when they get to a song, for some reason they have trouble remembering those notes." To address this issue, teachers emphasized the importance of reinforcing pattern and directional reading through games and tactile activities. Although a few note naming apps were mentioned, most teachers reported relying primarily on hands-on teaching aids rather than

technology. Games were used to support individual note recognition, keyboard geography, landmark notes, and pattern identification.

Assigning multiple pieces each week so that beginners consistently encounter new material was another strategy highlighted in one focus group: “So the more important thing is moving them through, always, always reading new notes every week. That is one of my main philosophies.” Another teacher affirmed this approach: “I’m pretty much the same… but for beginners, definitely, I think that’s the key, just keep playing, and that’s how I was brought up too.”

Pointing to the score while a student plays or briefly covering the student’s hands were strategies described to encourage learners to look at the music rather than at the keyboard. For students with strong aural skills, covering the hands was also recommended as a way to reduce reliance on auditory imitation. Students who resist note reading were a particular source of frustration for teachers. As one participant explained, “Because I don’t play every single piece for my students, a lot of them, their ear is very, very well developed, and they end up relying on it. And then you’re three books in and you realize, oh, you can’t read a single thing because I always play this for you first, or you listen to it on YouTube.” Another teacher described a similar challenge with a student who possessed excellent aural acuity: “She has a good ear. She can tell right away if the note’s wrong, but she won’t look at the note to see what it is, she’ll just play around on the piano to find it. So she’s using her ear more than her eyes, which can be a challenge when she’s learning new songs.” Additional strategies mentioned included singing pieces, singing with solfège, and using note speller books or written workbooks to reinforce reading skills.

Sight reading was the final topic addressed in the focus groups on music reading. Teachers in every group described incorporating sight reading into their lessons with beginner students. There was overwhelming consensus that the lesson book served as the primary source of sight reading material. Many teachers reported using the introduction of new repertoire as an opportunity for sight reading exercise or treating sight reading as an embedded activity within the lesson book: "I think, for the beginners because they are always assigned new pieces, I'm kind of, I kind of use that as sight reading, in a sense." Another teacher echoed this approach: "I find that just naturally, through the way that we're doing things, they are sight reading quite a bit like in our lessons we're reading, through new pieces all the time…" For several teachers, sight reading was incorporated directly within the lesson book, supplemented by a beginner series designed for sight reading, or supported by an activity or theory book that included sight reading exercises or sight reading cards: "With the beginners, I find probably most of it is just through the lesson whether it's again, an activity that's already in the book, maybe it's in the theory book." Most of the teachers discussed making sight reading a fun activity to engage beginners in the process:

> We wear our glasses that are special for sight reading because we need our good eyes ready.
>
> I also like cutting up all those old Capp and Bennett books and taking excerpts and putting them in little envelopes. You can make it a game and you pull out what your little example is.
>
> So I am always looking for ways to make it, you know, their special piece. That concept of like, I put things in cards like "Open up your card. What did you get? Look at that! Let's see!"...that kind of stuff to make it fun because I think it is.
>
> I have digital pianos mostly in the class so I want us to turn power off and play it with the counting aloud and or singing the note names out loud and then they can turn the power on and we'll do it a second time where they can hear what they're doing.

A few teachers mentioned how they perceive sight reading as a skill that can be learned: “I love sight reading…I have to try and make it so fun, because I think it’s such a great way to learn and it’s my favourite way so I try to get everyone on board.” Another teacher commented, “I think it's a really important skill because it really helps them in learning the pieces as well.” One teacher remarked on the value of sight reading as a musicianship skill, “…it's still rounding you out as a musician that can then do things on your own, because you know how to play some things by ear, because you know the intervals you know how to sight read.” However, most of the teachers did not formally incorporate sight reading into lessons until students were at the level where they might perform sight reading in an examination setting: “If we’re talking about exam kids, then that’s when we definitely have a book and we check mark and we go through and make sure we’ve covered all the material for the exam.” One teacher who is also an examiner made an interesting observation, “…and I wanted to say to you from an examiner perspective. I feel like most people don't work on sight reading because that's usually the worst, like I sometimes can't believe how bad it is. It's so bad like, generally.” I am also an examiner and find that in general, sight reading is usually a weak element on piano exams regardless of level. A clear discontinuity appears to exist within the music reading trajectory. While beginner students engage in sight reading consistently during lessons, this emphasis diminishes over time as instructional priorities shift toward performance preparation and the development of technical skills. Lesson time becomes increasingly devoted to refining and perfecting repertoire rather than introducing and reading new material. This pattern aligns with findings from previous studies on sight reading, which similarly indicate that systematic sight reading practice often declines as students advance.

Summary

The focus groups indicated that teachers do not rely exclusively on beginner piano method books for effective music reading instruction; rather, they draw on a range of resources and strategies to reinforce foundational reading concepts. The teachers reflected current pedagogical trends through their use of intervallic and eclectic approaches, landmark note strategies, and off-bench music reading activities. The discussions also revealed a disconnect between sight reading practices at the beginner level and the long-term development of sight reading proficiency. Although sight reading occurs naturally in early lessons through the introduction of new material, this emphasis diminishes as students advance, becoming overshadowed by performance preparation, technical development, and examination requirements. The absence of sound before sight approaches is particularly striking, as it may indicate a pedagogical preference for notation-first beginner methods within the participating teachers' instructional practices and in the larger teaching community.

MYC® Communities of Musical Practice Focus Groups

As part of the examination of Communities of Musical Practice (CoMP) within piano teaching, two focus groups composed of Music for Young Children® (MYC®) teachers were asked questions pertaining to music reading instruction, as well as additional questions regarding their experiences with the CoMP component of the program. As previously noted, all MYC® teachers are assigned to a nest following their initial level of teacher training, which serves as a clear example of a CoMP in action. As outlined in the literature, CoP are characterized by three core elements: the domain, the community, and the practice. Within the MYC® context, the domain is the shared commitment to teaching the MYC® curriculum. The community consists of local

groups of teachers residing in the same city or in nearby regions who meet two or more times per year, typically in a teacher's home or other informal community setting. The shared practice is cultivated through these meetings, during which teachers exchange information related to teaching the MYC® program, beginner piano pedagogy, student and parent management, lesson planning, and the operational aspects of running a piano teaching business. Analysis of the MYC® focus groups highlights several advantages of belonging to a CoMP for both novice and experienced teachers. Themes emerging across both groups underscore the supportive, collaborative, and beneficial nature of the CoMP structure.

Teacher support provided by their local CoMP emerged as the central theme across both the interviews and surveys. All participating teachers expressed, in various ways, that belonging to the CoMP was a positive and supportive experience. One teacher described her local group as "open to new things," while another noted that "it doesn't ever feel competitive or judge-y." A sentiment shared widely among participants was that the CoMP helped alleviate feelings of isolation or overwhelm, particularly for new teachers. As one teacher explained:

> Teaching piano can be a really lonely job, right? You're not going into the office with other people. You're on your own most of the time as a teacher. So having that community is, was a really crucial part for me.

This same teacher reflected on the challenges of her first year:

> When I was a first year teacher, I thought I was going to die. Like I remember going to my husband and crying, like, what was I thinking? I can't do this. To have, you know, somebody that you could call every other day is huge.

Belonging to a CoMP reduced these feelings of isolation by providing access to more experienced teachers who were willing to offer guidance and support. As one participant stated, it "is so valuable to have somebody in your corner who knows you and is willing to help out in a

specific time." Another emphasized the importance of collective expertise: "Getting input from other teachers is so valuable. Especially teachers that have been doing it a while and they have more wisdom and experience. It's so valuable."

Blair (2008) similarly asserts that a CoMP "focused specifically on the teaching of music is critical to the success of novice music teachers, because the particular demands and contexts of their jobs tend to promote professional isolation." Some teachers also noted that the CoMP provided support beyond pedagogical matters. One teacher with a young family described how, after having a baby, a colleague "actually stepped in for me when I had a baby and taught my classes to the end of the year, which was like so incredible. I don't know what I would have done without that." Another highlighted the group's collaborative ethos, remarking on their willingness to assist one another not only in teaching but also in business practices: "Our community of teachers, just being willing to help each other, being willing to do some advertising together, being willing to get together as musicians, but we don't always have to talk about music, like what's going on in your life." Taken together, these statements illustrate that the support provided by the CoMP is vital to teachers' success from both practical and professional standpoints. Belonging to a nest enables new teachers to build confidence in teaching the program, access the expertise of more experienced colleagues, and participate in an environment where mutual reliance and shared business practices foster a sense of security and collaboration. The supportive nature of the CoMP not only enhances teacher well-being but also contributes to increased motivation and creativity within their teaching practice.

Teachers reported that the CoMP provided a safe and open environment in which to discuss and exchange ideas. Members of their local groups described one another as "open to

new things," "open to sharing new ideas and giving new ideas," and "the most creative people I have ever met in my life." Reliance on the CoMP for teaching ideas and professional motivation was mentioned frequently. As one veteran teacher observed, "…when I have been teaching this long, I need fresh ideas… We can get stuck in ruts." Participants noted that their local CoMP offered essential inspiration, describing meetings as opportunities that "keep teachers motivated and excited" or as experiences where "you're engaged and it's uplifting then it just makes all the difference." Belonging to a nest enabled both new and experienced teachers to brainstorm collectively, motivating and inspiring one another through discussions about music reading, instructional strategies, parent and student management, and various aspects of operating a music studio.

With respect to music reading specifically, one teacher emphasized the value of diverse perspectives: "The group is so helpful to get all sorts of different ideas because you always have to be trying whatever is going to work for that child and it's not straightforward." The presence of teachers with varying levels of experience was viewed as essential to the success of the CoMP. This aligns with Wenger's framework, which emphasizes that CoP thrive when members at all experience levels can participate meaningfully. As one teacher with more than twenty years of teaching experience aptly noted:

> And I think it's important to remember that it is kind of a journey. We've never arrived, none of us. There's always new challenges and "Hmm, how am I going to deal with that kind of behaviour, how am I going to deal with that struggling class or that kind of thing?" And then to watch them light bulb and get it or watch a parent, you know, play an exam because they learned along with them and wanted to do it. Just those things. It's so rewarding.

An interesting theme that emerged from the discussions was the value teachers placed on meeting colleagues in person rather than relying primarily on online sources for information

or support. One teacher acknowledged that although MYC® provides a social media platform for teacher interaction, she found it difficult to make time to engage with it regularly. She remarked:

> I have a hard time focusing my attention for very long. So I yeah, prefer to actually meet in person, and, you know, go for a coffee or go for a walk, or whatever and talk. Yeah, I mean, sometimes there's definitely some neat YouTube things and I do always think I'll bookmark them and think, "oh this is great, I need to come back and watch this", and then I don't generally.

Another teacher expressed similar sentiments, noting, "I like the in-person meetings. I feel like we have a lot of personality traits in common… it is fun to socialize." One participant reflected on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the CoMP, stating, "I was just thinking that even though I did enjoy going to the meetings and all of that, I didn't realize how much I needed that until COVID came and then we did all the online stuff." Another teacher echoed this feeling of loss during the period without in-person gatherings: "The creativity is just unbelievable and I've missed that because we haven't had that in a couple of years… When we didn't meet, I remember saying to [name], I need to get together with people because I need to feel excited again, and that's what I always find I get from the get-togethers." These reflections highlight the essential social support that a CoMP can provide for piano teachers, who often work in isolation. While online communities may offer access to teaching advice, they do not necessarily foster the same sense of belonging, trust, and companionship that emerges from in-person engagement within a CoMP.

Summary

This examination of CoMP within the MYC® program underscores the significant role these communities play in supporting piano teachers across all stages of their professional development. The findings demonstrate that MYC® nests function effectively as CoMP, aligning

closely with Wenger's framework through a clearly defined domain, a strong sense of community, and shared pedagogical practices. Participation in the CoMP mitigates the professional isolation commonly experienced by piano teachers, particularly those entering the profession. Teachers consistently identified pedagogical, practical, and emotional support as essential benefits of belonging to their nest. The nest also emerged as a vital space for sustaining teacher motivation and creativity, offering a forum for exchanging teaching ideas, problem-solving, and generating innovative approaches. The presence of teachers with varying levels of experience enriched the learning environment and reinforced the understanding of professional growth as an ongoing, collaborative process. In this study, the in-person nature of nest meetings further emphasized the community's capacity to foster belonging, trust, and creative collaboration, qualities that were perceived as less readily cultivated through online interaction. Overall, the focus groups affirm that CoMP constitute an important pedagogical component of the MYC® program, contributing meaningfully to teacher development, professional resilience, and instructional effectiveness.

Personal CoMP Comments

The professional path of the independent piano teacher is demanding, requiring substantial self-education and ongoing professional development in order to remain aligned with contemporary pedagogical practices. As a new teacher, I was fortunate to receive consistent support and encouragement from the members of my MYC® nest throughout my years teaching the program, as well as in my private studio work. Many teachers, however, do not have access to such a support system. Inspired by research on CoMP, a colleague and I established a local CoMP composed of both independent and MYC® piano teachers, which we refer to as Monday

Musical Musings (3M). We meet several times a year in teachers' homes or local coffee shops to discuss a wide range of topics related to piano teaching, including challenging students, instructional strategies, and music reading pedagogy. The teachers in this CoMP expressed sentiments similar to those shared by participants in the MYC® focus groups, particularly regarding the personal and professional support afforded through membership in a CoMP. When I asked the 3M members why they attend our meetings, they offered the following comments:

> I attend 3M for multiple reasons. Being a private studio teacher, I do not have a "staff" and therefore have no one to bounce ideas off, or learn from, or commiserate with! 3M has no agenda, no rules & regulations, no purpose other than supporting each other in our shared passion. I like the ease of it and the building of community.
>
> I attended because I liked the idea of an open forum setting as opposed to a structured one. There was no agenda and participants were invited to bring along their personal questions or concerns. It was a wonderful morning of sharing ideas and everyone was quick to pass along their personal insights…3M invites participants to come and relax over a cup of coffee and simply discuss whatever is happening in their studios. It's a great format in my opinion.
>
> I like meeting with other teachers in person, to discuss teaching ideas, to commiserate and get advice about student difficulties, to find out what resources other teachers love to use, and to share resources that I love. To make connections with other teachers for when we need to pass students on to other teachers, and to hear about musical opportunities locally.

I also asked the members of my group to describe the ways in which participation in the CoMP was beneficial to them:

> This group is full of teachers in different seasons of their career and with different focuses and skill sets. I have benefitted by learning different ways to handle a situation (with parents or children), gaining insight into new books or a different series/method book than what I use, or being introduced to fresh ideas that others are trying/have done for years in their studios. I always leave a gathering with something to try or think about...and often a follow-up email with links or documents to make those new ideas become reality!

> It is good for my well-being to be able to talk to other teachers, as music teaching is not the most social profession. It energizes my teaching, as talking about what works in your studio makes you excited to teach it, and hearing ideas from other teachers gives you motivation to try something new and exciting.

Our group discussions frequently center on teaching strategies, beginner piano methods, and music reading pedagogy, as many of us work extensively with novice students and recognize that the early years of instruction present unique challenges. The findings from the CoMP focus groups make clear that this form of social learning provides meaningful support to teachers across all aspects of their work, including the development and refinement of music reading instruction.

4.6 Conclusion

As discussed in preceding chapters, the purpose of this mixed-methods study is to investigate the ways in which teachers support beginner piano students with music reading development and to examine how pedagogical and instructional resources support piano teachers' approaches to music reading instruction. The following research questions guide the study:

1. To what extent are music reading strategies and concepts identified in the scholarly literature and pedagogical texts present in beginner piano method books?

2. What are teachers' perceptions of music reading instruction and how do they navigate the different resources and approaches?

3. In what ways do teachers, who are members of a Music for Young Children® (MYC®) Community of Practice, engage with each other about teaching music reading?

The findings confirm that beginner piano method books remain the primary resource used by independent piano teachers for music reading instruction. Although teachers generally express satisfaction with the presentation of music reading concepts in these materials, they also acknowledge notable limitations. A review of scholarly research on sight reading expertise,

together with analyses of music reading content in piano pedagogy texts, suggests that beginner method books often omit several critical components necessary for developing comprehensive music reading skills. These include systematic reinforcement of keyboard topography, aural skills training, transposition, composition, and written activities that deepen conceptual understanding. Similarly, piano pedagogy texts, despite serving as authoritative resources for teachers, rarely provide substantive guidance on beginner music reading instruction, teaching strategies for music reading development, or approaches to sight reading. As confirmed by survey results, teachers predominantly rely on the primary lesson book as their main tool for facilitating music reading acquisition and sight reading practice. Given this reliance, it is essential that lesson books be strengthened through the inclusion of targeted exercises and activities that support music reading development, thereby reducing the need for supplementary materials.

The focus groups reveal that teachers employ a range of music reading strategies (some of which are reflected in existing pedagogy texts) and reinforce music reading skills through multiple approaches. Teachers acknowledge the limitations of method books and frequently supplement them with additional materials and tactile teaching aids to strengthen music reading concepts. They also report selecting method books according to the individual needs of each student and, in many cases, using multiple methods concurrently. When working with students who experience difficulty with music reading, teachers often rely on experimentation or revert to older strategies, such as mnemonic devices, to provide additional support. With respect to sight reading, most teachers use new pieces from the method book as the primary source of sight reading material rather than employing formal sight reading books. Participants in the CoMP focus groups consistently reported positive and supportive experiences. Their involvement

in the community not only facilitated their teaching of the MYC® program but also enriched their private teaching practices for those who taught both group and individual lessons. The teachers demonstrated that their CoMP fostered creativity, promoted a sense of well-being, and informed their instruction of music reading through collaborative exchange. CoMP offers a dedicated space for teachers to discuss instructional strategies and assist one another in navigating the multifaceted challenges of beginner music reading instruction.

Chapter 5:
Discussion of Research Questions

The most valuable resource that all teachers have is each other.
Without collaboration our growth is limited to our own perspectives.
Robert John Meehan

For many years, independent piano teaching was perceived as a low-status occupation (Bowers and Tick, 1986), where the completion of a Grade Eight conservatory examination was widely considered sufficient preparation to begin instructing others. Over the past three decades, however, attitudes toward piano teaching have shifted significantly. The establishment of additional piano pedagogy programs across Canada, increased public awareness of the cognitive and social benefits of early childhood music education, and the growing body of scientific research in neuroscience and piano pedagogy have all contributed to a reconceptualization of the field. Advocacy efforts by piano teachers themselves have further promoted the value of advanced training and higher education, helping to reposition piano teaching from a casual pastime to a recognized profession. Despite this progress, the standardization of educational requirements remains elusive. Although universities and conservatories offer pedagogy courses, diplomas, and degree programs, these pathways may be financially prohibitive or logistically impractical for many teachers. As a result, self-directed learning and collegial collaboration often serve as more accessible and cost effective avenues for professional development. Many teachers also rely on online resources including courses, webinars, conferences, and social media pedagogy communities, for guidance, inspiration, and support. Given the informal nature of the profession, piano pedagogy texts frequently function as authoritative references, beginner method books serve as the primary curricular resource,

and colleagues become essential sources of mentorship. Consequently, research that examines these resources is both relevant and necessary. For independent piano teachers in particular, information related to teaching beginners is especially critical, as young students often comprise the majority of a teacher's studio.

5.1 Discussion of Research Question 1

The introduction of music reading and the development of music reading skills constitute a central focus in beginner instruction; however, this remains an area in which practical pedagogical application requires significant improvement. The three primary research questions guiding this study focus on music reading and the systematic development of music reading skills in beginner pianists. The first research question addressed in this chapter is as follows:

> To what extent are music reading strategies and concepts identified in the scholarly literature and pedagogical texts present in beginner piano method books?

The theoretical framework of social constructivism informs the first research question and, consequently, provides a guiding perspective for both the review of music reading resources and the study. From a social constructivist standpoint, music reading instruction should be student centered, with the teacher facilitating the discovery of musical concepts through listening activities (sound before sign), the use of interactive teaching aids, off-bench staff exploration, and consistent review and reinforcement of newly introduced ideas (Wiggins, 2016).

Within this framework, students demonstrate understanding by responding to open-ended questions, articulating conceptual knowledge, identifying musical symbols and patterns, and accurately performing rhythmic exercises and repertoire. A collaborative, social constructivist learning environment fosters meaningful engagement and enables teachers to verify students' comprehension of previously introduced concepts before presenting new material. Given these

pedagogical expectations, it is essential that teachers have access to instructional materials, such as beginner piano method books, that align with social constructivist principles. The review of music reading and sight reading literature, and piano pedagogy texts on music reading development informs the creation of an analytic tool. This tool is then applied to twenty-three beginner piano method books, which are examined for concepts related to music reading content, book design, teacher support, and student activities. The following section first presents findings from the scholarly literature, followed by the results of the examination of the beginner piano method books.

A review of the scientific literature on music reading and sight reading yields a range of evidence-based strategies that can inform and enhance the instruction of beginning music reading. The development of music reading ability is widely regarded by piano pedagogues as an essential component of comprehensive musical training. For professional pianists, proficient music reading constitutes a significant asset, often expanding career opportunities and facilitating ease in collaborative performance settings. For students, strong music reading skills support the efficient learning of new repertoire and may contribute to increased longevity in piano study (Chronister, 2005). In all cases, individuals who can competently read music possess the foundational tools necessary to work independently, acquire new pieces with confidence, and sustain long-term engagement with the instrument.

The findings indicate that research on expert sight reading identifies numerous techniques employed by highly skilled readers to facilitate the decoding process. Proficient sight readers routinely chunk information into familiar structural units, recognize recurring melodic and rhythmic patterns, scan the score for visual cues, read ahead and back to the point of

performance, and rely on both visual-peripheral and auditory feedback. They also possess a well-developed understanding of theoretical and stylistic musical structures. These expert strategies can be effectively adapted for beginning students. Teachers can support novice learners by cultivating eye-tracking skills, familiarity with keyboard topography, the visual recognition of patterns within a musical score, foundational rhythmic competence, basic knowledge of rudimentary notational symbols, and essential aural skills. When such strategies are systematically incorporated into weekly instruction, students develop a solid foundation in music reading proficiency. As demonstrated in the literature, beginning students benefit from an intervallic or sound before sign approach, given that proficient readers consistently exhibit advanced pattern recognition and audiation abilities. However, many contemporary method books employ eclectic approaches that introduce directional concepts through pre-staff notation and intervallic reading but subsequently transition to a middle C based reading orientation. Focus group responses indicate that teachers predominantly rely on notation-first method books, particularly eclectic approaches, rather than strictly intervallic ones. Consequently, the development of aural skills must be intentionally supplemented during instruction. Teachers can enhance students' inner hearing and aural pattern recognition by incorporating activities such as solfège introduction, simple sight singing exercises, solfège-based presentation of new repertoire, call and response singing of patterns, and aural identification of musical structures.

Eye-tracking skills, such as maintaining visual focus on the score while playing, employing brief and purposeful glances at the keyboard, and developing tactile orientation on the instrument, are minimally represented in method books, either through short activities or explicit instructional guidance for teachers and students. Teachers can address this gap by

pointing to the score as students play, encouraging forward-looking visual tracking, assigning exercises that require playing finger numbers or simple patterns without looking at the keyboard, and modelling appropriate use of quick, efficient glances during performance. Establishing correct hand position, fingering, and hand placement further contributes to students' confidence in navigating keyboard topography. Because method books rarely provide sustained reinforcement of these music reading skills, it is incumbent upon the teacher to revisit these concepts consistently during lessons.

Music reading research also demonstrates the importance of chunking musical information and rapidly identify the underlying harmonic relationships within a score. These abilities indicate an understanding of music theory and musical structures. As shown in the method-book analysis, primary lesson books typically include limited written theory work, as theoretical instruction is often relegated to a supplementary theory book within the method series. To ensure comprehensive coverage of theoretical concepts, teachers should incorporate the corresponding theory book or employ additional resources such as theory games, worksheets, or other instructional materials. To strengthen students' understanding of musical structure, teachers may introduce simple composition activities and have students notate their work by hand. Composition provides an effective means of reinforcing music writing skills, solidifying knowledge of musical symbols, and introducing foundational concepts of musical form. For developing analytical skills, teachers can guide students in identifying repeated measures or sections, locating patterns or sequences, and distinguishing between major and minor modes.

The sight reading literature identifies accompanying and ensemble playing as effective strategies for developing music reading proficiency. Teachers should make use of the duet parts included in many method books, improvise simple accompaniments to student repertoire, or incorporate backing tracks when available. Lessons may also integrate rhythm ensembles, teacher–student duets, or teacher facilitated duets and small ensembles among students. Research further indicates that improvisation supports the development of both aural skills and music reading abilities. Although improvisation is largely absent from most method books (with the notable exception of *Piano Safari*), teachers can introduce beginners to improvisatory activities through accessible tasks such as improvising on the black keys, creating patterns within five-finger positions, improvising with one hand while the teacher provides an accompaniment, or adding improvised measures to an existing piece. A strong rhythmic foundation is another characteristic of expert sight readers. Gudmundsdottir (2010b) found that children tend to prioritize pitch information at the expense of timing accuracy, suggesting that the cultivation of rhythmic competence is essential for supporting music reading development. Since beginner piano method books rarely include dedicated rhythm exercises apart from those embedded within pieces, teachers must supplement instruction with additional rhythmic activities. These may include teacher-generated exercises or the use of external rhythm training materials.

Most teachers rely on the new pieces presented in method books as the primary source of sight reading material, as reflected in a focus group comment: “With the beginners, I find probably most of it [sight reading] is just through the lesson, whether it’s again an activity that’s already in the book, maybe it’s in the theory book.” However, it is also advantageous to expose students to additional sight reading experiences through pattern cards, short one-handed

melodies, or structured sight reading games. Sight reading can be assigned as an independent homework task or incorporated deliberately into lesson activities. In summary, the research literature highlights a range of effective music reading strategies that teachers can draw upon to enhance and support music reading development in novice piano students, particularly when such approaches are absent or insufficiently represented in method books.

Teachers cannot rely solely on the primary lesson book to address all of the components necessary for developing reliable and transferable reading skills. This limitation is underscored by several studies that highlight the persistent gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, indicating a need for instructional materials that emphasize exercises designed to cultivate music reading strategies, particularly pattern recognition, and to support the transfer of these strategies to actual sight reading tasks (Hardy, 1992; Fourie, 2004; Wristen, 2005; Zhukov, 2014). The beginning stages of music reading instruction are critical for establishing effective habits, such as appropriate hand position, fingering, consistent attention to the score, and forward-looking visual tracking, as well as for building a strong foundation in aural skills, rhythmic competence, and theoretical understanding. These foundational elements are essential for the eventual development of proficient music reading ability.

Teachers frequently consult piano pedagogy texts for instructional ideas, troubleshooting guidance, and practical “how-to” information. It is therefore reasonable to expect these texts, many of which are written with novice or inexperienced teachers in mind, to contain substantive discussions of beginner music reading concepts and corresponding teaching strategies. However, the review of these foundational works within the piano teaching profession reveals a notable deficiency in their coverage of music reading pedagogy. Despite this limitation, piano pedagogy

textbooks do offer a number of instructional strategies that teachers can incorporate when introducing music reading skills to young beginners.

To reinforce students' understanding of keyboard topography, several pedagogy texts recommend exercises in which students play keyboard patterns, as well as steps and skips with their eyes closed (Moss, 1989; Fisher, 2010; Jacobson, 2015). Because beginner method books generally do not include activities that support tactile familiarity with keyboard geography, teachers must incorporate and regularly review such exercises during instruction. Several pedagogy texts also advocate the use of flashcards to drill individual notes, facilitate single-note playing, reinforce intervallic reading, or practice short melodic patterns (Moss, 1989; Camp, 1992; Bastien, 1995; Baker-Jordan, 2003; Chronister, 2005; Fisher, 2010; Haroutounian, 2012; Jacobson, 2015, Blickenstaff, 2024). Although most method books do not supply flashcards, this form of drill remains widely used among piano teachers as an effective means of strengthening individual note recognition.

Despite the strong support in music reading research for intervallic or sound before sign approaches for beginners, piano pedagogy texts typically focus on the four principal notation-first reading approaches: multi-key, intervallic, eclectic, and middle C. These texts rarely address the advantages of sound before sign pedagogy, even though numerous studies demonstrate the central role of audiation and auditory feedback in expert sight reading. Several pedagogy texts do, however, provide specific strategies for integrating aural skills instruction with beginning students (Camp, 1992; Fisher, 2010; Haroutounian, 2012; Jacobson, 2015, Blickenstaff, 2024). Other authors emphasize the importance of ear training for developing music reading ability but offer limited guidance on how teachers might implement such instruction

(Kirshbaum, 1986; Chronister, 2005). Thus, when teachers adopt a notation-first method book, the responsibility for developing students' aural skills rests largely with the teacher. Sound before sign approaches remain relatively limited in availability and often require specialized teacher training, as in *The Suzuki Method* or the *Music Moves for Piano* series (based on Music Learning Theory). These approaches also depend heavily on parental involvement, which may present challenges for some families. As Pearce (2014) notes, sound before sign methods are "dependent upon parental attendance at all lessons and supervision of all of the child's practice" (p. 31). Most contemporary pedagogy texts nonetheless advocate for intervallic reading strategies, encouraging students to identify steps, skips, and repeated notes either aurally or visually, or to read from landmark notes as reference points (Camp, 1992; Clark, 1992; Fisher, 2010; Pearce, 2014; Jacobson, 2015, Blickenstaff, 2024).

As previously noted, research on expert sight reading indicates that pattern recognition and audiation play central roles in effective music reading development. Consequently, when teachers employ a notation-first method, they should select materials grounded in an intervallic reading approach, as this orientation is most conducive to establishing efficient and transferable music reading habits. Alternatively, teachers may choose to begin instruction with a sound before sight approach. The analysis of beginner piano method books reveals that, although intervallic and eclectic approaches provide more substantial support for music reading development than middle C or multi-key approaches, they vary considerably in the extent and quality of their offerings. While the findings confirm that teachers recognize the pedagogical advantages of intervallic reading, the majority nonetheless rely on eclectic methods. Several factors may account for this preference:

1. Availability and promotion—eclectic methods are widely distributed in music stores and heavily marketed.
2. Pacing—eclectic methods often progress more quickly than intervallic approaches, which may align better with the perceived needs of certain students.
3. Teacher familiarity—teachers may have been trained using eclectic materials and continue to rely on approaches they know well.
4. Misclassification—teachers may assume that eclectic methods adhere to a pure intervallic approach and therefore categorize them incorrectly.
5. Additional considerations—features such as book design, teacher-support materials, or the appeal of the repertoire may further influence teachers' selection of eclectic methods.

Several pedagogy texts recommend that students play and verbalize note names, sing note names, sing the melodic contour, or sing the lyrics of their pieces (Camp, 1992; Bastien, 1995; Baker-Jordan, 2003; Fisher, 2010; Haroutounian, 2012, Jacobson, 2015). In alignment with findings from sight reading research, singing along with repertoire is an effective means of refining aural skills and reinforcing musical patterns, whereas verbalizing note names is comparatively less beneficial for developing fluent reading. The analysis of method books indicates that they rarely instruct students to sing while playing despite the presence of lyrics for most pieces, or direct teachers to incorporate singing; thus, teachers must implement these practices independently. Rote playing provides another valuable avenue for strengthening aural skills, and several pedagogy texts recommend its use with beginning students (Ahrens & Atkinson, 1954; Chronister, 2005; Lyke, Haydon, & Rollin, 2011, Jacobson, 2015, Blickenstaff,

2024). Although most method books do not include repertoire specifically for rote teaching, (*Piano Safari* being a notable exception as rote instruction is integral to its design), teachers can readily supplement lessons with rote pieces from the very first lesson. Rote repertoire offers beginning students the opportunity to explore the full range of the keyboard and to perform pieces that exceed their current reading level, thereby supporting musical engagement and aural development.

Activities such as improvising, composing, and ensemble playing are seldom addressed in piano pedagogy texts and are likewise infrequently incorporated into beginner method books. This omission may stem from the perception that these tasks constitute supplementary or "enrichment" activities rather than essential components of music reading development. In some instances, such activities may appear in the supplementary volumes of a method series; therefore, teachers must examine the full range of materials within a series to determine which instructional opportunities are available. Improvising on the piano reinforces patterns, musical structure and helps to develop and improve internal pulse and rhythmic fluency (Lehmann et al., 2004), all of which strengthen music reading skills. Even at a rudimentary level, beginner students can improvise using the black keys, three-note patterns or five-finger scales. Composing assists in a students' understanding of line and space notes, basic staff notation, theory concepts and musical structure. For beginners, teachers can assign written exercises or use manipulatives (i.e. interactive teaching aids designed to support conceptual understanding), such as a floor staff (Bastien, 1995; Fisher, 2010; Haroutounian, 2012). To facilitate ensemble playing, teachers can utilize the teacher-duet parts often included in method books, employ backing tracks when provided, or improvise accompaniments.

As confirmed by the survey findings, music reading constitutes a primary focus of beginner piano instruction however, a substantial gap remains between the information provided in piano pedagogy texts and the practical teaching strategies required by teachers to effectively introduce and develop fundamental music concepts such as music reading. Piano pedagogy authors are encouraged to draw more extensively on research in sight reading and on studies from music and language learning to strengthen their discussions of music reading acquisition. While familiarity with the principal reading approaches and an understanding of the strengths and limitations of contemporary method books are valuable, teachers benefit more meaningfully from guidance on how to facilitate music reading development in beginner students. Such guidance should include strategies for reinforcing reading concepts, supporting students who experience music reading difficulties, and identifying common pitfalls in early music reading instruction. Accordingly, piano pedagogy texts should address music reading as a foundational skill by providing practical, research-informed teaching strategies, rather than implying that adherence to a method book alone is sufficient to ensure the development of reliable music reading skills.

As demonstrated in the preceding discussion, research on music reading, sight reading and piano pedagogy literature offers a range of effective strategies for developing music reading skills; however, these strategies are not readily accessible to teachers. Moreover, the music reading concepts and instructional approaches identified in these sources are inconsistently represented, and in some cases largely absent, in beginner piano method books. Consequently, the responsibility falls to the teacher to enrich and extend music reading instruction for young students. The following section provides a synthesized summary of strategies designed to

enhance the in-lesson student experience for the development of music reading skills in beginner piano students:

- Begin piano instruction with an intervallic or sound before sign approach, or incorporate aural skills training with a notation first approach
- Reinforce individual note recognition and individual note playing through flashcards
- Review step, skip and repeat patterns in pieces and through off-bench activities
- Participate in listening activities and games that develop pattern and rhythm identification
- Develop a thorough knowledge of the staff through games or written exercises
- Assist students in developing strong rhythmic skills with aural and notational activities
- Develop a strong tactile sense of the keyboard with activities or exercises which require the student to play without looking at the keyboard
- Sing beginner pieces with solfege
- Teach rudimentary theory and review concepts with written work
- Emphasize five-finger positioning and correct fingering while students perform technique or pieces
- Analyze new pieces with students to make familiar ideas of form and analysis
- During lesson time or as an assignment, listen to music from different eras and styles
- Create collaborative experiences for novice students by playing teacher/student duets, utilizing teacher accompaniments in beginner method books, or have students play with backing tracks
- Teach simple composition using patterns or five-finger scales
- Engage students in activities that promote ear playing and improvisation
- Incorporate sight reading into every lesson and/or assign sight reading tasks for homework
- Assist in developing eye-tracking to 'look ahead' and promote quick glances at the keyboard when sight reading
- Use interactive teaching aids to review music reading concepts off-bench

In addition to the strategies listed above, Jacobson (2015) offers an excellent pre-teaching technique for new concepts which she refers to as "sound, feel, symbol, name." This instructional procedure aligns with the scholarly literature reviewed for this study and provides an outline for presenting new concepts to beginner students. She remarks:

> Because music is aural, music learning should start with an aural experience (sound). After there is a clear aural perception of the concept, it should be experienced at the keyboard (feel) and felt with the body. Once these experiences have occurred, the sign or

> symbol (notation) can be recognized, and finally, a name for that symbol can be learned (Jacobson, 2025, p. 30).

With this pre-teaching technique, beginners learn new concepts and pieces through sound discovery; activities and exercises that lead the student through the learning process first through sound followed by symbols and notation. This technique may be used effectively in conjunction with notation-first beginner method books. Blickenstaff (2024) provides another valuable pre-teaching technique for new concepts (including music reading concepts), which he calls “preparation, presentation, reinforcement.” Under this instructional approach, teachers initially prepare students to encounter a new concept through integrated aural and kinesthetic experiences. Blickenstaff observes that piano teachers often do not adequately prepare students for upcoming concepts and adds that “a thorough preparation of concepts is rarely printed in method books” (Blickenstaff, p. 39). After the student has demonstrated understanding, the teacher will then name the concept and present the actual notation. The final step is to reinforce the new concept through a variety of activities which can involve singing, writing, listening, games, movement or sight reading. These teaching strategies can be effectively integrated during the first years of instruction, allowing teachers to review, reinforce, and creatively adapt music reading concepts according to the needs of individual students. Piano teaching is inherently a social process where learning is contingent upon human connection and shared experience between student and teacher. Therefore, the in-lesson experience is critical to the development of music reading skills. A holistic approach, as described above, that encompasses notation, rhythm, aural skills, technique, interpretation, and creativity, enriches students’ engagement with music reading.

Teachers must be made aware of the wide range of approaches available to aid development of the music reading process; however, these strategies are dispersed across numerous pedagogical texts or embedded within lengthy research studies, making them difficult to access and synthesize. A comprehensive resource outlining how to approach music reading instruction with beginners, and detailing the strategies and their practical applications, would therefore be of considerable value to teachers. Moreover, teachers should recognize that beginner piano method books frequently lack explicit guidance for both teachers and students regarding music reading development, and many do not provide sufficient exercises or reinforcement. It is therefore incumbent upon teachers to supplement their chosen method with the strategies outlined above to deliver the most comprehensive and effective music reading instruction.

5.2 Discussion of Research Question 2

Teaching beginners is a rewarding experience but requires patience, imagination, and perseverance. In many independent piano studios, beginners constitute a substantial portion of the student roster, while some teachers choose to specialize exclusively in early childhood instruction. Insights from the focus groups indicate that teachers who work with beginners consistently describe the experience as both positive and rewarding. One participant noted, *"*I just find I have so much fun with them, and the fact that they are just complete sponges…they soak it all in. They can be, you know, wild and crazy, but they're still getting it." Despite these rewards, teaching this age group also presents distinct challenges, particularly in the area of music reading development. As a result, teachers frequently seek guidance from colleagues or

consult piano pedagogy literature to refine their approaches. The second research question addressed in this study is as follows:

> What are teachers' perceptions of music reading instruction and how do they navigate the different resources and approaches?

In many respects, the career of an independent piano teacher is largely self-directed, requiring practitioners to cultivate a wide range of competencies beyond musical expertise. As self-employed business owners, independent teachers must assume the responsibilities of accountant, administrator, marketer, counsellor, and numerous other roles in addition to that of piano instructor. The COVID-19 pandemic further expanded this skill set, compelling teachers to develop proficiency in information technology and online communication. While many teachers acknowledge that holding a music degree or a pedagogy diploma from a conservatory provides valuable foundational knowledge, such credentials are neither mandatory nor wholly sufficient for navigating the practical realities of day-to-day piano teaching. When I first entered the profession, newly graduated with a music degree, I assumed, perhaps naively, that advanced musical training would naturally translate into ease in teaching. This assumption quickly proved misguided. To build confidence and acquire practical pedagogical strategies, I turned to piano pedagogy literature and sought guidance from more experienced colleagues.

Piano pedagogy texts serve as a primary resource for teachers, offering not only practical instructional guidance but also recommendations for managing the administrative and organizational aspects of a piano studio. However, their usefulness is inherently limited. These publications tend to address a broad range of topics at a general level and frequently lack detailed, step-by-step strategies that teachers can readily apply in daily instruction. Essential areas, such as music reading development, aural skills, sight reading, and rhythmic training, are

often treated briefly or omitted altogether. A further limitation lies in the impossibility of capturing the full spectrum of teaching scenarios that arise in real world studio settings. No single text can feasibly anticipate the diverse challenges teachers encounter, such as working with young students who struggle to maintain focus, managing oppositional behaviour, or addressing persistent difficulties with music reading. Consequently, while pedagogy texts provide valuable foundational knowledge, they cannot replace the nuanced, situation-specific problem solving that teachers must develop through experience and professional dialogue.

Teachers across all focus groups agree that there is no "one-size-fits-all" method book and that students require an individualized approach to learning. Many participants note that they routinely draw upon a wide range of teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of their learners. They also concur that no single method is comprehensive enough to address all aspects of beginner instruction, and they expressed contentment with using multiple methods or supplementing with additional materials, an approach that is further supported by the survey findings. The methods most frequently discussed were intervallic and eclectic approaches, both of which align closely with recommendations found in sight reading research and piano pedagogy literature. Notably, none of the teachers in the focus groups reported using a sound before sight approach when teaching beginners, despite its support in scholarly studies. This may be attributable to a teacher's own educational background as those trained with a notation-first approach often replicate that model with their students. Additionally, the market offers a far wider selection of notation-first method books compared with sound before sight options, which may further influence teachers' choices.

Since teachers predominantly employ intervallic and eclectic methods, the use of landmark or guide notes emerged as a frequently cited strategy, along with reading by pattern and direction; both approaches well supported in sight reading research and piano pedagogy literature. Teachers also expressed a preference for introducing one new note at a time, accompanied by substantial repetition to reinforce retention. Notably, this incremental approach does not appear in any of the pedagogy texts referenced by participants. Teachers further reported using cue words for landmark notes and incorporating stories to help students visualize note placement on the staff, techniques that were likewise absent from the texts. Although current pedagogy generally discourages the use of mnemonic devices, teachers acknowledged employing them selectively for students who struggle to remember landmark notes or who require additional support with note identification. Flashcards and games were among the most common strategies used to reinforce music reading concepts. While both appear in some pedagogy texts (flashcards more prominently), teachers described using them extensively, either during lessons or as homework. Games were used to review patterns, note names, keyboard geography, and landmark/guide notes, despite their relatively infrequent mention in pedagogy literature. Another widely used strategy, though absent from the texts, was assigning multiple short pieces each week to strengthen reading fluency through frequent exposure. Consistent with recommendations from sight reading studies and pedagogy texts, teachers emphasized encouraging students to look at the score rather than their hands. Strategies included pointing to the music while the student played or briefly covering the hands to redirect attention to the page. To support aural development, teachers incorporated singing, either of the pieces themselves or using solfège, both practices aligned with established pedagogical guidance. To

reinforce note recognition and reading concepts, teachers assigned note spellers, workbooks, or written activities completed during lessons, all of which are supported by sight reading research and pedagogy texts. Several teachers observed a disconnect between students' ability to identify isolated notes and their ability to apply this knowledge within repertoire. To address this gap, they emphasized pattern-based reading, keyboard geography, and frequent exposure to new pieces. Teachers also expressed frustration when students with strong aural skills resisted note reading, highlighting an ongoing tension between ear-based and notation-based learning. Most teachers incorporated sight reading informally, typically through the introduction of new repertoire in lesson books rather than through dedicated sight reading programs. They emphasized making sight reading enjoyable through games and creative activities, though formal sight reading instruction tended to increase only as students approached examination levels.

The findings of this study underscore the complexity and adaptability required when teaching music reading to beginner piano students. The focus group discussions reveal a shared understanding among teachers that effective instruction cannot depend on a single method, resource, or pedagogical strategy. Instead, teachers construct a flexible, individualized approach, supplementing method books with creative activities, games, and other materials tailored to each student's needs. Because music reading strategies are dispersed across a wide range of studies and pedagogical texts and are often presented only in broad or generalized terms, it is likely that teachers acquire many of these strategies through experimentation, trial and error, and professional dialogue with colleagues. This process of continual adaptation reflects both the demands of early level instruction and the resourcefulness of independent piano teachers in addressing the diverse learning profiles of their students.

5.3 Discussion of Research Question 3

Piano teachers benefit profoundly from engaging in ongoing professional discourse with one another. In my experience, whenever a group of piano teachers gathers, the conversation naturally gravitates toward our shared practice; we can easily spend hours discussing teaching approaches, student progress, and studio management. These exchanges consistently generate a wealth of creative pedagogical ideas and fresh perspectives. Over the course of my teaching career, conversations related to music reading have typically centred on method book choices, common reading challenges, and imaginative strategies for reinforcing note reading and note recognition. This section examines how participation in a Community of Music Practice (CoMP) informs teachers' understanding of music reading pedagogy and provides a collaborative, supportive environment. In doing so, it addresses the third research question:

> In what ways do teachers, who are members of a Music for Young Children® (MYC®) Community of Practice, engage with each other about teaching music reading?

Participation in group settings provides a highly effective environment for professional learning, particularly when these groups function as a CoMP. The Community of Practice (CoP) theoretical framework outlined by Wenger (1998) informed the development of the research question, supported the identification of the MYC® CoMP, and guided the interpretation of the study's findings.

A Community of Musical Practice (CoMP) provides an ideal forum for both new and experienced piano teachers to address the challenges of running an independent studio and to refine their pedagogical skills. Independent teachers often work in home studios or rented spaces without colleagues or built-in professional networks, which can contribute to feelings of isolation. Many teachers also experience stress or uncertainty when navigating instructional or

behavioural challenges on their own. All participants in the MYC® focus groups reported that belonging to a CoMP significantly reduced these feelings of isolation. Access to more experienced teachers, opportunities to seek input, and the ability to draw on the collective wisdom of the group were consistently described as invaluable. This aligns with research demonstrating that mentorship and ongoing professional support benefit novice teachers across disciplines (Blair, 2008). A CoMP dedicated specifically to piano teaching thus plays a crucial role in supporting both new and seasoned MYC® instructors. Teachers also emphasized that participation in a CoMP fosters an atmosphere of open expression without judgement, where the sharing of ideas, questions, and concerns is encouraged. Experienced teachers noted that the community helped rejuvenate their enthusiasm for teaching and provided renewed inspiration. After many years in the profession, it is easy to become complacent, relying on familiar resources and established routines rather than exploring new beginner methods or innovative teaching strategies. Within a CoMP, however, experienced teachers are continually exposed to contemporary pedagogical practices and creative teaching tools, supporting ongoing professional growth and reflective practice.

A major benefit of belonging to a CoMP is its influence on pedagogical creativity and problem-solving, particularly in relation to music reading instruction and student learning. In both focus groups, teachers spoke enthusiastically and in detail about the games, activities, and challenges they use to support note reading development. For example, one teacher described her annual *Note-vember* initiative: *"*Every year in November, I call it 'Note-vember.' We really spend the whole month just naming notes, which I find is good timing too because it's before the

majority of the year. So it really sets them up for success for note reading." Another teacher remarked:

> I've been trying to use more than one method. I have a class where 2 of the kids are great at note naming and 2 of them are really, really struggling…and I've been trying to do things with the intervallic kind of thing. I've been kind of pushing them into looking at steps and skips along with the note names. So this week I got out the peanut interval game which had them sorting out peanuts that had the melodic and harmonic seconds and thirds so that they'd recognize what they look like both, harmonic and melodic. So yeah, I've been trying to do as many different ways of getting them to be able to read and play music as I can.

One teacher's strategies echoed the sentiments of most of the focus groups:

> I'll give them a fresh set of flashcards, something new. Give them some apps that they could try. I also, you know depending on the class makeup do more note naming games. We're struggling with note reading, so we're going to do a game. I have little cue words that I use as reminder of how we first learned it. So I use stories and then I've just got like little cue words and they need less and less as they go along.

Another teacher observed that new challenges continually arise in teaching and that different students require different strategies to overcome their difficulties. Without the support of a CoMP, a teacher may struggle with beginner music reading instruction, experience heightened stress or frustration, rely on ineffective pedagogical approaches, or find that students develop weak reading skills; in some cases, such challenges may even contribute to teachers leaving the profession. The presence of members with varying levels of experience enriched the discussions on music reading and exemplified Wenger's concept of legitimate peripheral participation, in which newcomers learn through engagement with more experienced practitioners within the community.

A Community of Musical Practice offers significant benefits to the independent piano teaching profession. Regular gatherings, whether in person or online, provide an essential forum for discussing effective teaching procedures, exchanging ideas, and exploring new pedagogical

tools. This is particularly valuable for independent teachers who typically work in isolation and lack the collegial environment found in institutional settings. A CoMP also offers mentorship for new teachers who may feel overwhelmed, and it provides emotional support for those navigating personal, family, or teaching related challenges. New teachers frequently seek guidance on method book selection and strategies for reinforcing music reading skills. Access to a community of experienced colleagues, many of whom have tested a wide range of method books and developed effective approaches to teaching music reading, greatly assists newcomers as they navigate the complexities of early level instruction. For experienced teachers, collaboration within a CoMP fosters renewed motivation and creativity, both of which are essential when working with beginners and cultivating foundational reading skills in young students. CoMP create successful learning environments by engaging members in meaningful activities such as relationship building, knowledge sharing, and collective efforts to refine teaching practices. They also serve as catalysts for innovation and creativity. Participation benefits individual teachers while simultaneously elevating the overall standard of teaching within the broader community. Regardless of experience level, all piano teachers stand to gain from collaborative learning environments, and the CoMP model provides an ideal structure for expanding professional knowledge and strengthening pedagogical practice.

5.4 Conclusion

This discussion of the three research questions, considered alongside the data presented in the previous chapter, underscores the need for more robust and comprehensive resources to support music reading instruction for beginner piano students. Piano pedagogy textbooks, resources that should ideally offer thorough guidance, fall short in their treatment of music

reading pedagogy. Although these texts frequently endorse the intervallic approach, which is well supported by sight reading research, many omit critical information on sound before sight approaches, on activities that reinforce music reading such as improvisation, composition, and transposition, and on the role of aural skills training in strengthening reading fluency. To align more fully with the scholarly literature, beginner piano method books should integrate a clear intervallic framework, incorporate substantial aural and rhythmic training, and include activities such as transposing, improvising, and composing, as well as written exercises to reinforce note reading concepts. Importantly, these elements should be embedded directly within the primary lesson book, which, as indicated by both the survey and focus group data, serves as the central teaching resource for most instructors. CoMP emerge as essential professional learning environments that support teachers in navigating the complexities of music reading instruction. They provide opportunities for teachers at all experience levels to exchange effective strategies, share teaching aids, and collaboratively develop creative solutions to common challenges. The field of piano pedagogy should actively encourage the formation of CoMP within teaching communities and promote informal, in-person networks that facilitate collaboration and mutual support. Because music reading constitutes a foundational component of early piano instruction, the refinement of pedagogical materials and the strengthening of collaborative professional networks are both crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of beginner level piano education.

Chapter 6:
Conclusion

Change is the end result of all true learning.
Leo Buscaglia

Over the course of my twenty-five years as a piano teacher, the field of piano pedagogy has undergone substantial transformation. Conservatory syllabi now include a broader representation of female and BIPOC composers, and new pedagogical approaches have emerged to support neurodivergent learners. The domain of music reading instruction has likewise evolved. Whereas mnemonic devices and the middle C approach once dominated early instruction, contemporary pedagogy now emphasizes the use of landmark notes and intervallic reading. Similarly, sight reading was previously regarded as an innate ability where one was thought to be either "born a sight reader" or "born an ear player." Current research however, recognizes sight reading as a teachable skill that develops through systematic training. Despite these advancements, significant gaps remain in the quality and comprehensiveness of music reading resources for beginners. To investigate this issue, three research questions were posed to examine the effectiveness of existing materials, the strategies teachers employ in practice, and the role of CoP in supporting music reading instruction:

1. To what extent are music reading strategies and concepts identified in the scholarly literature and pedagogical texts present in beginner piano methods books?

2. What are teachers' perceptions of music reading instruction and how do they navigate the different resources and approaches?

3. In what ways do teachers, who are members of a Music for Young Children® (MYC®) Community of Practice, engage with each other about teaching music reading?

To address these questions, this study examined beginner music reading through five complementary avenues of inquiry: (1) a review of expert sight reading research to identify the strategies employed by skilled sight readers; (2) an analysis of piano pedagogy textbooks to extract information on reading approaches, method books, sight reading practices, and music reading teaching strategies; (3) a systematic review of beginner piano method books to evaluate their presentation of music reading concepts; (4) a survey designed to capture teachers' perceptions of, and reliance on, beginner method books; and (5) four focus groups aimed at uncovering the strategies teachers use in practice, including two groups that discussed their participation in a Music for Young Children® CoMP. This chapter presents the conclusions associated with each research question, outlines the study's limitations, offers recommendations for future research, and concludes with a personal reflection.

6.1 Conclusion for Research Question 1

Several music reading and sight reading studies were examined to identify the processes used by expert sight readers and to generate a comprehensive list of music reading strategies. These strategies were then compared with those found in beginner piano method books. The research shows that expert sight readers possess a highly developed sense of keyboard topography, maintain a larger eye–hand span than novice readers, look ahead while playing, and chunk musical information into recognizable patterns or theoretical structures. They also draw on textual cues within the score to construct musical meaning and demonstrate a degree of notational audiation. To align beginner instruction with these expert behaviours, teachers can adapt and simplify these strategies for young learners. This includes reinforcing keyboard geography, pointing to the score while students play, modelling brief glances at the keyboard,

cultivating pattern recognition, and introducing rudimentary theory, composition, improvisation, and transposition. Developing rhythmic skills, incorporating aural skills training, playing duets or ensemble pieces, and adopting a sound before sign approach further support early music reading development. These elements can be revisited throughout the year during weekly lessons through targeted activities and games, both on and off the piano bench.

A central conclusion emerging from the sight reading literature is the strong relationship between aural skills development and music reading proficiency. Although contemporary teaching practices often introduce musical notation from the very first lesson, “proponents of the sound before sign approach argue that children will have difficulty learning to read notation unless their musical knowledge is sufficiently developed for them to be able to relate the sound of what they can already play with the symbols used to represent them” (McPherson & Gabrielsson, 2002, p. 1). Historically, many influential pedagogues have advocated for a sound before sign philosophy. Johann Pestalozzi (1746–1827) emphasized that children should encounter concepts through direct sensory experience before being introduced to symbolic representations. James Mainwaring (1887–1952) argued that students should learn to “think in sound,” and Edwin Gordon (1927–2015), through Music Learning Theory, placed audiation at the centre of early musical development. Shinichi Suzuki (1898–1998) formalized a systematic sound before sign method, often referred to as the Mother-Tongue Approach, modelled on natural language acquisition: first listening, then imitation, and only later the introduction of written symbols (Uszler et al., 1991, p. 82). The underlying premise of the sound before sign approach is that sensory and motor experiences must precede symbol learning. A common criticism is the concern that students may struggle with note reading or fail to develop reading fluency.

However, sight reading research consistently demonstrates that strong aural skills correlate with successful sight reading performance. A more practical challenge lies in the limited availability of systematic, progressive sound before sign methods. While approaches are available, such as *The Suzuki Method* and *Music Moves for Piano* (based on Music Learning Theory), some obstacles exist: (1) they require teacher training, (2) instructors accustomed to notation first methods may be hesitant to adopt unfamiliar pedagogical models without clear guidance and (3) parental attendance at weekly lessons is often required. Although some beginner piano method books incorporate aural skills reinforcement and other strategies that support music reading development, many remain deficient in these areas and often lack explicit instructions for teachers or students. Consequently, teachers must be made aware of the wide range of strategies available to reinforce music reading skills beyond what is provided in the method book.

It is essential to establish a strong foundation for reliable music reading skills at the beginner and elementary levels, as the development of proficient music reading ability requires sustained time, training, and practice. Despite broad acknowledgment among music educators of the importance of music reading ability and sight reading, many piano students continue to demonstrate weaknesses in this area (Hardy, 1992). One focus group participant, speaking from her perspective as an examiner, also noted this persistent reality, emphasizing that insufficient sight reading preparation remains one of the most common deficiencies observed in student performances:

> …and I wanted to say to you from an examiner perspective, I feel like most people don't work on sight reading because that's usually the worst, like I sometimes can't believe how bad it is. It's so bad, generally…It's a surprise when you get a student who can sight read proficiently as in, there's a steady pulse there…Most of them don't have a steady pulse

> whatsoever. They're just going from note to note, no sense of rhythm and missing the key signatures and all kinds of things…I don't know how teachers are approaching this, I feel like we are not.

In 1995, the American pedagogue Stewart Gordon published *Etudes for Piano Teachers*, in which chapter four, aptly titled *Neglected Skills*, addresses three areas frequently overlooked in piano instruction: sight reading, improvisation, and collaboration. Nearly thirty years later, these skills continue to receive insufficient attention. Several factors may contribute to this ongoing neglect: (1) limited teacher training in these areas, (2) a lack of high-quality instructional materials, and (3) the absence of these competencies in most beginner piano method books. Although teachers commonly rely on beginner method books as a de facto curriculum, they also recognize that these resources do not offer a fully comprehensive approach to music reading instruction. As one teacher noted, “It is up to the teacher to pull from different methods and aids in order to help the student learn. I only use the book as a source of pieces and general guide.” While some method series include supplementary books devoted to sight reading, theory, or improvisation, survey results indicate that teachers primarily use the main lesson book. This may reflect financial considerations for families, or simply the practical challenges of managing multiple books with young children, such as misplaced or forgotten materials. In summary, music reading and sight reading research provides teachers with valuable strategies for supporting beginner music reading development. Method books can better align with this research by incorporating exercises that strengthen aural and rhythmic skills, offering repertoire that reinforces intervallic reading, including activities that review keyboard geography and pattern recognition, and basic composition, all within the primary lesson book. Teacher guides should also supply clear, practical instructions, such as pointing to the score while students play, encouraging brief

glances between the keyboard and the music, and modelling effective reading behaviours. The music reading strategies used by expert readers can be readily adapted for young beginners, enabling teachers to guide students more effectively along their music reading journey.

Alongside the music reading literature, this study also examined piano pedagogy textbooks, which remain a central resource for independent piano teachers. These texts provide valuable guidance on a wide range of instructional and professional topics, and both novice and experienced teachers benefit from their discussions of business practices, teaching strategies, and performance related issues. With respect to beginner instruction, pedagogy texts typically address subjects such as reading approaches (i.e., middle-C versus intervallic), method book selection, group programs for young children, hand position, and introductory rhythm pedagogy. However, many of these texts lack dedicated sections on beginner music reading acquisition, music reading teaching strategies, sight reading development, composition, improvisation, and, critically, references to empirical research on music reading. Authors of pedagogy texts would benefit from engaging more deeply with research in music education, language acquisition, and sight reading to strengthen their treatment of early music reading development. A substantial gap exists between the information currently provided in these texts and the practical strategies an inexperienced teacher requires to teach this foundational skill.

Twenty piano pedagogy texts were reviewed for this study. Of these, Fisher (2010) and Jacobson (2015) offered the most substantial guidance on music reading instruction. While several texts endorsed the intervallic approach, consistent with findings from sight reading research, many unexpectedly omitted detailed information on beginner music reading pedagogy. This omission is particularly striking given that beginner and elementary students constitute a

significant portion of most independent teachers' studios. Some texts included sections on sight reading for more advanced students but did not address how reading skills are acquired at the earliest stages. The absence of comprehensive music reading guidance in pedagogy texts implicitly positions the beginner method book as the primary source of information on reading instruction. This assumption is problematic. It suggests that simply following the reading approach presented in a method book will lead to reliable reading skills, which is not supported by research. Music reading is not an isolated skill; it is strengthened through aural training, rhythmic development, technical patterns, writing activities, and musical experiences such as improvisation, transposition, composition, and ensemble playing. As demonstrated in this study, most method books do not consistently include these elements or provide sufficient reinforcement of core reading concepts. Since music reading acquisition requires time, repetition, and thoughtful scaffolding, many students encounter challenges along the way. Pedagogy texts should therefore include explicit guidance on beginner music reading instruction, including practical teaching strategies, common obstacles faced by young learners, and effective methods for addressing these difficulties. At present, only a small number of texts offer such support. The method book analysis further indicates that many beginner piano method books lack the teaching strategies, activities, and exercises necessary to adequately support music reading development. The primary lesson book could be significantly strengthened by incorporating:

- written exercises that reinforce notation concepts
- activities that develop keyboard topography
- aural exercises introducing high/low, up/down, patterns, and intervals
- rote pieces to support aural skills development
- rhythmic development through clapping and movement
- simple composition, transposition, and improvisation tasks

- teacher duets for all pieces
- short sight singing exercises

Teacher guides should accompany these materials and provide clear, practical strategies for music reading instruction, including solutions to common reading problems. Musical literacy is the foundation of lifelong engagement with the piano. Its development must begin in the earliest lessons, supported by teaching materials that reflect current research and provide teachers with the tools they need to cultivate confident, fluent readers.

6.2 Conclusion of Research Question 2

Four focus groups were conducted with piano teachers who instruct beginner students between six and nine years of age. Two groups consisted of independent piano teachers, while the remaining two were composed of MYC® teachers, some of whom also maintain private studios. The discussions revealed that teachers frequently supplement their primary method book with additional materials to support music reading development and that they employ a range of instructional approaches to meet the individual needs of their students. This reflects an important pedagogical consideration: no single method can adequately address the diverse learning profiles of all beginners. Notably, methods based on an eclectic reading approach were reported as the most commonly used, despite evidence suggesting that strictly intervallic approaches align more closely with current sight reading research. Several factors may account for this discrepancy. Eclectic methods are more widely available, their faster pacing is often better suited to older beginners (eight or nine years old), and they are generally perceived to offer more engaging repertoire than intervallic methods.

The most frequently employed strategy for teaching music reading was the diversified use of flashcards to reinforce single-note identification and the relationship between staff

notation and keyboard geography. This approach was also widely represented in several piano pedagogy texts. Multiple factors appear to contribute to the prevalence of flashcards in early music reading instruction: they offer an efficient means of reinforcing note recognition during lesson time, can be adapted into numerous formats to sustain student engagement, may be assigned as homework, help build confidence in single-note identification, and assist beginners in locating the starting notes of repertoire. Teachers also reported using landmark notes and often created cue words or short narratives to reinforce their positions on the staff. Mnemonic devices for staff note names were generally avoided but were used when necessary. Although this strategy is considered outdated, it can support students who experience difficulty with single-note identification. One effective adaptation involves providing a mnemonic for the space notes only and then using those as reference points to determine the line notes. To support reading by pattern and direction, teachers employed a variety of techniques, including the use of pattern cards, pointing to notation while the student played, reviewing keyboard topography, written theory work, singing pieces, and incorporating solfège. These strategies are well supported by sight reading research and represent effective means of cultivating strong music reading skills, yet they were largely absent from the majority of pedagogy texts reviewed. Overall, the focus groups indicate that teachers are generally satisfied with beginner piano method books but remain cognizant of their limitations. They express comfort supplementing these materials with external resources or create their own instructional aids to better meet the needs of their students.

Teachers and the in-lesson experience play a central role in the development of music reading in young children. This process is fundamentally social in nature and aligns directly with

Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development. From this perspective, musical notation does not become meaningful through solitary decoding or through text, but through socially structured activities in the lesson where the teacher acts as a guide, providing scaffolding for the learner. This is accomplished through shared problem-solving, demonstrating, guided questioning, pointing, cueing, and through meaningful, musical experiences. Although the beginner piano method book functions as an important instructional resource, it is ultimately the teacher who mediates and guides the student's development of music reading.

6.3 Conclusion of Research Question 3

One component of this study examined Communities of Musical Practice (CoMP) and their role in supporting teachers both personally and professionally. Communities of Practice (CoP) are defined as groups of individuals who share a common concern or passion and who engage in ongoing interaction to learn from one another and improve their practice (Wenger, 2011). Within this social learning framework, knowledge is shared and constructed among individuals connected through a common domain, community, and practice. Two focus groups were conducted with piano teachers involved in the Music for Young Children® (MYC®) group piano program. A distinctive feature of this program is the CoMP embedded within its teacher-support structure. Each teacher belongs to a nest, a geographically organized group of MYC® teachers who meet throughout the year to discuss and refine both business and pedagogical aspects of the program. The focus groups revealed that both novice and experienced teachers derive substantial benefit from participating in a CoMP. Teachers reported reduced feelings of professional isolation and diminished overwhelm when beginning to teach the program, noting that their CoMP provided essential guidance, reassurance, and practical advice. Such ongoing

support is particularly critical for new teachers, enabling them to develop professionally without persistent frustration or stress.

Experienced teachers also reported significant advantages. Collaboration and discussion with nest members were described as motivating and revitalizing, often renewing their enthusiasm for teaching. Participants expressed a strong preference for in-person CoMP meetings over online interactions, citing trust, companionship, and a sense of excitement as key reasons. The in-person format also fostered an environment in which teachers felt comfortable sharing ideas without fear of judgment, thereby encouraging creativity and innovation. When functioning effectively, a CoMP serves as a valuable space for learning, sharing, and collaboration, offering both professional and personal support while enhancing piano teaching practices. Through regular dialogue with colleagues, teachers can refine their approaches to beginner music reading instruction. Indeed, method books and music reading strategies remain frequent topics of discussion among teachers seeking effective resources and pedagogical solutions, especially given the diversity of students' reading difficulties and the need for individualized instructional responses. Access to colleagues with diverse educational backgrounds and teaching experience within a CoMP structure can significantly enrich instructional practices, especially in the domain of beginner music reading.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

Every effort was made in this study to ensure the accuracy and validity of the findings; however, several limitations are inherent due to the study's specific scope. First, the selection of beginner method books was restricted to those published in North America and those previously examined in method book research. Two additional Canadian methods (*WunderKeys and Let's*

Begin) were included to represent current national publications, and one American method (*Piano Safari*) was added due to its prominence in online piano pedagogy communities. Many other method books currently in circulation were not included in this analysis, particularly those published outside North America. It is possible that these omitted methods contain music reading strategies that align more closely with scientific literature than those found in North American publications. A second limitation is the decision to analyze only the primer or first level of each series. Since the survey and focus groups indicate that teachers generally use only the primer or first level of a method series, I was interested in examining which music reading strategies and concepts students were initially introduced to through these books alone. Music reading strategies absent from the primary books may appear in other core books of a series. A third limitation concerns the participant sample for the focus groups, which was confined to teachers from two Canadian provinces (Ontario and Saskatchewan). Finally, the analysis of both the beginner piano method books and the teacher focus groups was conducted from my own interpretive perspective. As with any qualitative analysis, unintentional biases or omissions may be present.

6.5 Future Research

Several directions for future research arise from this study. An examination of the subsequent levels and additional core materials available within each method series would provide insight into the exercises and activities designed to support music reading development, thereby assisting teachers in selecting methods that more effectively cultivate reading skills. A longitudinal study investigating the sight reading abilities of beginner and elementary students could illuminate the long-term effectiveness of various reading approaches. Such a study might

also reveal common reading strategies and errors among young beginners and determine whether these patterns correlate with the reading approaches emphasized in the method books used. A study comparing the reading abilities of pianists taught with notation-first methods versus sound before sign methods may highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Further inquiry into the reading strategies embedded in sight reading books for beginners would clarify how these resources contribute to music reading development. A study investigating music reading from the perspective of beginner or elementary students may reveal how children think through and solve music reading problems during lessons and home practice, informing improvements in the delivery of music reading instruction. Additionally, research into CoMP composed of piano teachers may uncover additional music reading strategies beyond those identified in the present study and reveal further ways in which teachers support one another professionally and in developing effective reading instruction. Collectively, research in these areas has the potential to improve instructional materials for beginner students while simultaneously enhancing teachers' pedagogical approaches to music reading.

6.6 Personal Reflection

Music reading has been a subject of sustained interest throughout my teaching career. I have considered the process from cognitive, neuroscientific, and pedagogical perspectives and have continually sought to refine my instructional strategies in this area. My deep curiosity about music reading originates from my longstanding love of sight reading. Even as a young piano student, I devoted far more time to sight reading and learning new pieces than to practicing assigned repertoire. As a professional musician, strong music reading skills have enabled me to work as an accompanist, church musician, and, most importantly, have significantly enriched my

teaching. When students select new repertoire, I often demonstrate several pieces for them; an experience that consistently elicits amazement at my ability to easily play selections from various books. Their reactions make clear that they, too, aspire to develop this skill.

Over the years, I have observed considerable variation in the music reading abilities of young students. Some thrive in music reading, while others struggle or resist the process. This disparity motivated me to further pursue formal study. The present project affirms my belief that effective music reading instruction must begin in the earliest lessons and supports my suspicion that teachers often lack sufficient information and resources to teach music reading effectively. My teaching philosophy is grounded in the conviction that musical literacy enables students to participate fully in music through performance, composition, and collaboration. Findings from this study suggest that beginner music reading is strengthened by well-developed aural and rhythmic foundations and by activities such as improvisation and composition. The more frequently music reading skills are reinforced through varied musical experiences, the more secure these skills become as children progress in their pianistic development. Many of my students have been able to pursue diverse musical opportunities as a result of their strong reading abilities, including accompanying school events and choirs, learning additional instruments with ease, and performing in high-school ensembles. Some older students have even secured employment as accompanists or church musicians. Although music reading is not strictly required for all forms of musical engagement, it remains a valuable asset for students, amateurs, and professionals alike, enabling fuller participation in a wide range of musical activities.

Three personal outcomes emerged from this study: the establishment of a Community of Musical Practice (CoMP) within my local teaching community, the development of an aural skills workbook for beginner students, and the enhancement of my pedagogical approaches to teaching beginner music reading. The 3M meetings (referenced in Chapter 4), expose teachers to a broader range of pedagogical strategies and ideas than can typically be found in published pedagogy texts. These meetings also provide guidance tailored to specific teaching situations, student challenges, and music reading difficulties that arise with beginners. For me, dialogue with other teachers has been the most effective means of finding solutions, particularly in the area of music reading. My 3M group has become an invaluable professional network that connects me with supportive colleagues, fuels my creativity, and sustains my motivation throughout the year. I encourage teachers to seek out like-minded colleagues in their region to form a CoMP, as such a community may become one of the most valuable resources for developing effective music reading instruction. This study also identified aural skills training as a critical component in the development of music reading proficiency. In response, I created an ear training workbook for my young beginner students to use during their first year of lessons. The workbook contains progressive exercises, informed by the study's findings, that address key areas of aural skills development: major and minor tonality, rhythm exercises, pattern identification, steps and skips, tonic-chord solfège, and clap-back activities. These exercises are designed to reinforce and support the development of music reading skills during each lesson. As a third outcome of this study, I have enhanced my teaching practice by integrating a broader range of research-supported strategies known to promote music reading development including improvising, transposing, composing, and the systematic use of solfège with my young beginner

students during weekly lessons. Although the findings of this study suggest that the sound before sight approach may be the more effective method for teaching beginner music reading, I continue to employ notation-first approaches with my students. This decision is informed by several considerations. First, adopting a sound before sight method would require a substantial investment of time and resources to acquire training and familiarity with one of the established approaches. Second, sound before sight methods often depend on consistent parental participation during weekly lessons, which is not always feasible or desirable for all families. Third, given the wide availability and variety of notation-first method books, it is generally easier to select materials that accommodate the individual learning needs and circumstances of each student. Furthermore, I contend that beginner students can develop proficient music reading skills within notation-first approaches when instruction is supported by effective, research-informed teaching strategies and when lessons incorporate activities that actively promote music reading development, as outlined in this study.

Given the central role that music reading plays in the development of young pianists, it is essential that teachers have access to effective instructional materials to support this aspect of learning. By integrating activities that reinforce aural and rhythmic skills, along with written exercises such as composition, teachers can enhance their approach to music reading instruction while continuing to use a standard notation-first beginner piano method book. Engagement with other independent piano teachers through a Community of Musical Practice (CoMP) further strengthens instructional effectiveness, as collaboration and knowledge sharing allow teachers to refine their strategies and address challenges collectively. Working with beginner students is a deeply rewarding endeavour, though not without its frustrations. Incorporating effective music

reading strategies alongside a chosen method book can ease the learning process for young students and foster greater confidence and independence. As I continue my teaching journey and share the joy of music with others, the findings of this study will undoubtedly guide my ongoing approach to music reading instruction with beginner students.

Appendix A
Piano Teacher Survey

Teacher Information

1. What is your age? (optional)
    - 18 – 25
    - 26 – 35
    - 36 – 45
    - 46 – 55
    - 55 and older
2. How many years have you been teaching piano?
    - 1 – 10 years
    - 11 – 20 years
    - 21 – 30 years
    - Over 30 years
3. In what format do you offer beginner piano lessons? Private, group or both?
    - Private
    - Group
    - Both

Method Book Information

1. What beginner piano method book series are you currently using with your beginner students?
    - Alfred's Premier Piano Course

- Bastien Piano Basics
- Celebrate Piano
- Hal Leonard Piano Student Library
- John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course
- Leila Fletcher Piano Course
- Piano Adventures
- Piano Pronto
- The Music Tree
- Wunderkeys
- Other _____

2. Are you using all core books from the series offered (theory, technique, recital repertoire etc.)?
    - All books
    - Some books
    - Just the primary lesson book
3. Do all your beginner students (6-9yrs old) use the same method book series?
    - Yes
    - No
4. What do you like about your chosen beginner piano method book? (check all that apply)
    - Reading approach (middle C, Multi-key, Intervallic, Eclectic (all 3 in combination)
    - Quality of the pieces
    - Sequencing of new concepts

- Use of diagrams
- Creative elements (Ex. Improvising, composing)
- Design of the book
- Illustrations and diagrams
- Teacher duets
- Other _____

5. Is there anything that needs improvement with your current beginner piano method book?

Music Reading Information

1. On a scale from 1 to 6 how would you rank "development of music reading ability" compared to other skills (rhythm training, ear training, technique etc.) for beginner piano students? (1= not important, 6=most important)

   1 2 3 4 5 6

2. How much lesson time do you spend on music reading activities away from the piano with your beginner students (note games, worksheets etc.)?
   - 1 – 5 minutes
   - 6 – 10 minutes
   - Other _____
3. Do you consider beginner piano method books to be an important resource for teaching music reading (1=not important, 6=very important)?

   1 2 3 4 5 6

4. Are you satisfied with the way music reading is presented in your chosen beginner piano method book (1=unsatisfied, 6=very satisfied)?

   1 2 3 4 5 6

5. On a scale from 1 to 6 how would you rank your current beginner piano method book at presenting music reading? (1=poor, 6=excellent)

   1 2 3 4 5 6

Sight Reading Information

1. Do you incorporate sight reading into your beginner piano lessons?
   - Yes
   - No
2. What sight reading book do you use with your beginner students?
   - 4 Star Sight Reading
   - Sight Reading for Success
   - Improve your Sight Reading
   - None
   - Other _____
3. How much lesson time is devoted to sight reading activities?
   - 1 – 5 minutes
   - 6 – 10 minutes
   - Other _____

If you are interested in sharing your experience and expertise in a 90-minute focus group discussing teaching strategies for music reading, please provide your name and email. Since the focus group will be limited to 10 teachers, I will only contact those who are selected for the focus group.

Name _____

Email _____

Appendix B:
Focus Group Email

Hello!
Thank you for recently completing a survey on Beginner Music Reading. At the end of the survey you indicated your interest in participating in a focus group and you have been randomly selected.

The focus group will consist of 5 teachers and myself where we will discuss your experiences teaching beginner music reading. The session will be approximately 90minutes long over Zoom and will be very relaxed and informal.

If you would like to participate, please read and sign the attached Participant Consent Form. The signed form must be emailed back to me by Friday January 19.

Once I have received the forms I will send out potential dates and times for the focus group discussion. Thank you again for taking the time to answer the survey and for your interest in participating in the focus group. I appreciate your time and willingness to advance research in music reading.

Alessandra DiCienzo

Appendix C:
Focus Group Consent Form

uOttawa

Université d'Ottawa
Faculté des arts
École de musique
University of Ottawa
Faculty of Arts
School of Music

An Analysis of Music Reading as Presented in Beginner Piano Method Books

Alessandra DiCienzo
Faculty of Music
University of Ottawa
Interdisciplinary Research in Music PhD Candidate

Roxane Prevost
Faculty of Music
University of Ottawa
Project Supervisor
r.prevost@uottawa.ca

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Alessandra DiCienzo, a PhD student at the University of Ottawa. This project is supervised by Professor Roxane Prevost.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to evaluate the presentation of beginner music reading as presented in beginner piano method books and to examine teacher perceptions of teaching music reading to young beginner piano students. The study aims to highlight areas of improvement in the presentation of music reading in beginner piano method books and to provide comprehensive strategies for teaching beginner music reading.

Participation: My participation will consist of a 90 minute focus group held over Zoom. During the focus group I will be asked to speak about my experiences teaching music reading to young beginner piano students. The focus group will be recorded and transcribed. The recording and transcription will not be shared with any participants.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I discuss my experiences teaching music reading to young beginner piano students. I may have to discuss difficulties I have faced when teaching beginner students. I have the option to refuse to answer any questions during the focus group and can withdraw at any time.

☎ 613-562-5733
613-562-5140

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Ottawa ON K1N 6N5 Canada
www.uOttawa.ca

Benefits: My participation in this study will allow me to engage with fellow colleagues to discuss teaching music reading to young beginner piano students. I may gain useful teaching strategies during the discussion. The study will contribute to the advancement of beginner piano pedagogy, will provide useful teaching strategies for piano teachers and highlight areas of improvement in beginner piano method books.

Confidentiality and Privacy: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share in the focus group will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for research purposes and that my identity will be protected. Anonymity will be guaranteed, and participants' identity will be concealed with an alias for publication purposes. I understand that excerpts of the video recording from the focus group may be used for research purposes, such as in the context of conferences, but that only clips of the audio will be shared to protect my identity, which will be concealed with an alias. I understand that the researchers cannot guarantee that other members of the focus group will entirely preserve the confidentiality of the information I will share during the focus groups.

Conservation of Data: The data collected (video recording, transcript, researchers' notes, and consent forms) will be kept in a secure manner. This hard material will be stored in a locked desk drawer in Alessandra DiCienzo's home studio. The electronic material (recording) will be stored on an external hard drive, which will also be stored in the desk drawer. Alessandra DiCienzo will be the only one with access to the filing cabinet. The material will be conserved indefinitely.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. Given the collective nature of group discussions, should I choose to withdraw, my responses cannot by withdrawn and will be used in the study.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or the supervisor. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity via email (ethics@uottawa.ca) or telephone (613-562-5387).

It is recommended that I (keep/print/save) a copy of this consent form for my records.

Acceptance: By signing my name below, I agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's name: _____

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's name: Alessandra DiCienzo

Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D:
Focus Group Questions

Independent Piano Teacher Focus Group Questions

1. Tell me a little about yourself and your piano studio.
2. What do you enjoy and find challenging about teaching beginner piano students?
3. Teachers have a lot of choice when it comes to beginner method books. What do you like and dislike about the one you are using currently?
4. What are the difficulties your students face when music reading and how do you help them to overcome them?
5. Tell me about the sight reading activities that you do with your students.
6. Do you have any other comments that you would like to share about teaching beginner music reading?

MYC® Teacher Focus Group
Additional CoMP Questions

1. MYC is unique in its CoP built into its program for teachers. Tell me about your experiences with your teacher nest meetings or larger nest meetings?
2. How does the MYC nest support you and your teaching?

APPENDIX E:
Review of Music Reading Content in Piano Pedagogy Textbooks

For All Piano Teachers, Aherns & Atkinson (1954)
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES
Teach rote pieces during the first lesson (p.93)
Use mnemonic devices for the lines and spaces until thoroughly familiar (p.94)
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
Hints that sight reading is a natural ability but concedes that daily practice can improve sight-reading for any student (p.76)
Suggests using the middle reading approach which is described as practical (p.93)
Use beginner books that include interesting tunes, properly sequenced, words that can be sung, clear printing, and large notes for children (p.94)
Include ear training and sight reading at each lesson which is carefully planned (p.95)
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
Keep eyes on the music and avoid watching the hands (p.77, 93)
Make sure the student has knowledge of theory, musical form and can recognize patterns (p.77)
Read ahead while sight reading (p.77)
Provides steps in elementary sight reading (p.78)
Comments: Although this book is dated, the idea that systematic work and careful training in sight reading from the first lessons is most beneficial to students is still relevant today as are the valuable suggestions for sight reading provided
The Young Pianist, Last (1972)
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES

Introduce pieces by rote at the first lesson (p.15)
Build up knowledge of notation and time values step by step (p.79)
Intervals should be recognized by their shape/appearance (p.80)
Avoid using mnemonic devices for the lines and spaces (p.81)
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
Suggests using a middle C reading approach which is described as easiest for the young beginner to grasp (p.13)
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
Have students read short pieces every day (p.79)
Do not look at the keyboard while sight reading (p.82)
Have the student play blindfolded or with eyes shut (p.82)
Play duets or have the student read one hand of a piece while the teacher plays the other (p.82-83)
Use attractive music two levels below the students current level (p.83)
The Pianist's Problems, Newman (1984)
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES
None
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
None
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
Promotes the study of sight reading and points out the advantages of fluent sight reading ability (p18)
Fluency in sight reading is a necessary skill for professional pianists, teachers and collaborative artists, it makes the study of the instrument more pleasurable, allows access to a wide variety of literature (18-19)

Suggests that sight reading be studied systematically where the student should begin from easier sight pieces then gradually progress in difficulty (p.19)
Sight read a lot of literature with wide variety of styles (p.20)
Keep the eyes on the music, look ahead, and take in as much information as possible when looking at the music while playing (p.22-23)
Sight read in ensembles (p.24)
Comment: The last section of the book, *Il Maestro e lo Scolare* (p.194), Newman discusses a sight reading approach to beginner music reading. He cites a book by Leonhard Deutsch called *Piano-Guided Sight Reading* (1950) which describes reading by contour and direction rather than by position or the middle C approach. Newman supports this reading whereby students are not reading single notes but by groups and patterns similar to the intervallic approach.
The Challenging World of Piano Teaching, Kirshbaum (1986)
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES
None
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
Phrasewise reading starts with a recognition of steps and skips (p.12)
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
Theoretical knowledge and the ability to recognize musical patterns greatly assists with reading development (p.12)
Students should recognize a wide variety of chords by sight and ear (p.12)
Ear training is essential for the development of fluent music reading skills (p.12)
Sight read horizontally and vertically (p.12-13)
Learn to scan music from the bass upwards (p.13)
Include ensemble playing (p.14)
Includes a teaching list of sight reading abilities (p.14-15)

Comment: Kirshbaum writes for students with a few years of piano study.
More Than Teaching, Moss (1989)
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES
None
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
With beginner students teachers devote time to keyboard geography and drilling of the notes on the lines and spaces (p.80)
Once the drills are understood introduce conjunct then disjunct reading (p.81)
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
Provides steps for sight reading: check the key and time signature, look ahead while playing, cover the notes about to be played so the student focuses on the music and not their hands, count evenly, and play duets to help students maintain a steady beat (p.81)
The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher, Uszler et al. (1991)
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES
None
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
Discusses the cognitive aspects of learning and beginner reading (p.55-61)
Contains a brief history of piano method books (p.106)
Describes the three main reading approaches, Middle C, Multi-Key and Intervallic outlining the pros and cons of each approach (p.107-110)
Discusses vertical/harmonic reading (p.118-119)
Includes descriptive reviews of method books (p.122-146)
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES

None
Teaching Piano: The Synthesis of Mind, Ear and Body, Camp (1992)
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES
Begin with pre-reading experiences with rote tune and scale duets (p.20, 43)
Begin with the aural aspect of intervallic reading by singing interval tunes or singing the words to the pieces (p.22)
Present neighbour notes in several pieces before introducing skips (p.22)
Approach reading one note at a time to reinforce note relationships (p.22)
Place the concept of neighbour and skip notes, keyboard direction and pitch direction in an aural context at the outset (p.23)
Sing the words or say the note values out loud while playing (p.45)
Introduce intervals one at a time after the student has grasped steps and skips (p.47)
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
The pre-reading stage gets the mind accustomed to directing the ear, emotions and body in rhythm (p. 20)
Provides comments about selecting and evaluating piano method books (p.17, 21)
Describes the various reading approaches (p.21)
Advocates for the intervallic approach (p.21)
The ability to pre-hear musical ideas should begin at the beginning of lessons (p.23)
Includes criteria for selecting method books (p.26-27)
Includes a list of common reading problems (p.27)
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
None

Questions and Answers: Practical Advice for Piano Teachers, Clark (1992)
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES
Approach interval reading in two steps where students first find the starting note in each hand by its interval relation to the nearest landmark note, then read by intervals (p.58)
Have students point and say the direction and interval distance (p.58)
Before playing a piece have the student scan the score, practice the rhythm by point and count or tap and count, then find the position for each hand (p.58)
Develop keyboard awareness by having students locate keys without looking at their hands, have students name specific keys (the key between two black keys) with their eyes closed, have students play specific keys with their eyes closed (p.64)
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
Offers a detailed explanation of why young students struggle with reading concepts up/down and high/low (p.55-56)
Offers a detailed explanation of how to explain ledger lines to young students (p.56-58)
Includes an answer to a question about careless readers recommending the teachers develop students who listen, see and understand (p.60-61)
Describes and endorses rote teaching and recommends some exercises (p.61)
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
Sight read one piece at every lesson (p.66)
Sight read duets (p.66)
How to Teach Piano Successfully, Bastien (1995)
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES
Expose students to a period of pre-staff reading (p.104)
Have beginners read by shape and contour (step, skip, repeat) (p.104)
Beginners should recognize intervals in the first year from 2nd to 5ths (p.104-105)

Use note flashcards at the lesson and at home where students name the note on the card and play it on the keyboard and play flashcard games (p.105)
While playing the student should sing or say the note names (p.106)
Use written work to reinforce note reading (p.107)
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
Includes a chapter on beginner methods which contains a description of the various reading approaches, criteria for the evaluation of piano methods, and reviews of method books (p.39-77)
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
Use flashcards with short musical phrases made in a progressive order (p.138-139)
Practical Piano Pedagogy: The Definitive Text for Piano Teachers and Pedagogy Students, Baker-Jordan (2003)
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES
None
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
Includes a chapter on reviews of beginner piano method books (p.167-206)
Recommends flashcard study in various iterations for students with weak reading (p.140)
For students with weak reading work out of two contrasting method books simultaneously that are two levels below the pupil's current level (p.140)
For weak readers give the student practice steps to follow at home where the student selects one line of a piece to: say the note names, say the note rhythm names, tap and count the notes, play and say the note names, and play and count out loud (p.141)
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
None

Comment: This text only includes suggestions for music reading in relation to working with transfer students who have weak reading skills
The Art of Teaching Piano: The classic guide and reference book for all piano teachers, Agay (2004)
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES
None
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
None
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
Teach single note recognition for the grand staff and their keyboard location (p.161)
Provide note reading flashcards for daily practice (p.161)
Use pilot notes (landmark notes) to facilitate note recognition (p.162)
Look at the notated page and not the hands when sight reading (p.162)
Identify keyboard notes, groups of two and three black keys without looking (p. 163)
Use flashcards for interval recognition (p. 163)
Sight read simple folk songs in five finger position (p.165)
Read and play major and minor triads (p.165)
Look ahead while sight reading and read notes in groups (p. 169)
Identify patterns and repetitions of melodic fragments while sight reading (p.170)
A knowledge of elementary harmony is a necessary precondition for good sight reading (p.174)
Agay ends the section on sight reading with sight reading repertoire considerations and general sight reading suggestions (p.168)

Comment: Reading strategies are presented in the context of sight reading from the beginner to advanced level
A Piano Teacher's Legacy, Chronister (2005)
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES
Use pieces that have notation that speaks directly to the student (p.148-149)
Play pieces on the black keys to prepare students to recognize the white key groupings (p.150)
Introduce first staff pieces without a clef then introduce the grand staff (p.150)
Expose students to aural, rhythm and technique activities that support music reading (P. 157-159)
Use beginner methods where the pieces are composed to directly reflect how they would sound (p. 159)
Teach rote pieces to beginners so they can explore the full range of the keyboard (p.166)
Have students focus on note groupings rather than single note identification (p.166)
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
Advocates for reading by pattern and direction (p.149)
Fluent sight reading is the ultimate goal of music reading but the ability to read music does not indicate proficient sight reading skills (p.154)
Sight reading is a special skill and requires special training (p.154)
Three aspects of interval reading; thinking, feeling and hearing, which allow students to reach their music reading potential (p.165-166)
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
Describes a process for sight reading drills called "mini flashes" (p. 155)
Piano Pedagogy: A Practical Approach, Parker (2006)
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES

Give students flashcards for daily practice to prepare for staff reading (p.7)
Hand out four flashcards at the first lesson and add two new notes at each succeeding lesson (p.7)
Expand the flashcards with intervals starting with 2nds (steps) and 3rds (skips) (p.7)
Use a descriptive story to orient students to the keyboard (example provided) (p.7)
Encourage parents to review the flashcards every day at home (p.7)
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
Discusses the various reading approaches and provides criteria for selecting a method book (13-15)
Provides reviews of beginner method books organized by reading approach (p.17-24)
Includes a summary chart of the method books (p.25-28)
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
Provides a very detailed ten step method for developing sight reading (p.160-162)
Lists ten points for teachers to follow when teaching sight reading (p.162-163)
Lists fourteen points for students to use for reviewing sight reading pieces before playing and while playing (p.163)
Gives nine sight reading tips for piano exams (p.164)
Provides suggested sight reading resources (p.165)
The Independent Piano Teacher's Studio Handbook, Klingenstein, 2009
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES
None
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
None

SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
Teach pattern recognition away from the piano through singing, clapping and movement (p. 217)
Reinforce pattern recognition in written music with sight singing and sight playing (p.217)
Look over the piece before sight reading it noticing patterns or repeated sections (p.218)
Have students play and count out loud while sight reading to develop rhythmic accuracy (p.218)
Play without stopping to correct mistakes and learn to leave out unessential notes or simplify complex music to achieve this (p.218-219)
Look ahead while sight reading (p.218)
Look at the music rather than the keyboard (p.219)
Always sight read with hands together (p.219)
Learn to read intervallically (p.220-221)
View chords as a single unit (p.220)
Develop good fingering habits with sight reading (p.221)
Lists ways to incorporate sight reading during a lesson: • Sight read during every lesson • Give weekly sight reading assignments • Have old books to loan out for sight reading • Use overlapping lessons to have student sight read with a partner • Use the supplementary sight reading book of a method series • Play teacher-student duets • Play along with backing tracks while sight reading (p.221-222)
Includes sight reading resources (p.222-223)
Comment: Reading strategies are presented in the context of sight reading from the beginner to advanced level
Teaching Piano in Groups, Fisher (2010) *these exercises are adapted for a private lesson
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES

Use landmark notes and have students read intervallically from them (p.127)
With a rhythmic accompaniment, chant the location (high or Low) of either the 2 or 3 black keys (p. 129)
Generate a list of things that create high and low sounds with the student. On a separate sheet, draw a line through the middle and have the student draw pictures of the listed items with high sounds to the right of the line and low sounds to the left (p.130)
With hands on the keyboard and eyes closed the student locates any requested note by feel (p.130)
Use alphabet flashcards and have the student arrange the music alphabet forwards and backwards (p.130)
Have students create their own mnemonic device for the lines and spaces (p. 130)
Drill note names and their location on the grand staff (p.130)
Place a note on a floor or magnet staff and have the student name the note and play it on the piano (p.131)
Place two notes on a floor or magnet staff and have the student name, name and sing, and/or name and play the interval (p. 131)
Listen to music and have the student shape the melodic contour in the air (p.132)
Have students draw in the direction of their piece on the music with straight lines for up, down, repeat and a curved line for skips (p.132)
Have the student transpose their pieces and say the direction while they play (p.132)
Play a piece for the student and have them sing the melody in solfege or by direction (p.133)
Play a new piece for the student and have the student follow along. Stop at random moments and see if the student can identify the stopping point (p.133)
Play a new piece for the student and make intentional mistakes. Ask the student if they can identify the errors (p.133)
Play a melody or clap a rhythm and have the student repeat it (p.133)

Create flashcards with two short melodies or rhythms on each. Perform only one of the options and have the student choose the correct one (p.133)
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
Students should be able to hear a tone or a series of pitches in their mind's ear when looking at its symbol, even before it is sounded on the piano (p.127)
Students should learn to read using a combination of both intervallic and multiple-key approaches (p.127)
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
Students should be trained to use a systematic sight reading preview routine (p.128)
Use a coloured pencil to trace the contour or direction of the melodic line (p.128)
Direct students to speak or chant the melodic motion in rhythm (p.128)
Students should engage in daily reading from a sight reading book or from piano literature (p.129)
Provides a list of characteristics of a good sight reader (p.129)
Outlines step-by-step how to facilitate sight reading with students and provides fifteen sight reading activities which can be done in groups or can be altered for a private lesson (p.133-135)
Creative Piano Teaching 4th ed., Eds. Lyke, Haydon & Rollin (2011)
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES
None
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
Explore the music alphabet on the white keys starting from the lowest A with a beginner student during the first lesson then back down (p. 45)
During the first lesson teach a piece by rote (p.46)
Includes criteria for selecting a method book (p.48-53)

Chapter 5 is an article by Richard Chronister "Naming Notes is not Reading" of which the strategies have been addressed in *A Piano Teachers' Legacy* (p.55-68)
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
None
The Success Factor in Piano Teaching: Making Practice Perfect, Pearce (2014)
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES
None
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
Explains the two basic reading approaches: rote and reading (p.31-32)
Divides the reading approach into two categories, the traditional grand staff approach and the reading-readiness approach (p.32-33)
Describes the grand staff approach as a notion-first method with pieces immediately presented on the grand staff with many reading concepts introduced at once (the middle C reading approach), and the reading readiness approach may refer to an intervallic or eclectic approach (p. 32-33)
Advocates for the reading-readiness approach (p.33)
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
None
Comment: This text focuses primarily on practicing and other pedagogical topics so content on music reading is limited.
Fourth Finger on B-Flat, Haroutounian, (2012)
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES
None
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
Provides a list of five reading approaches with a description of each (p.67)

Contains 5 factors to consider when selecting a method book (p.67-69)
Includes a comparative chart of seven methods which she has evaluated for scope and sequence along with pacing and modality (p.69-71)
Provides a list of "learning experiences" that go beyond the method book: • rhythm activities through movement • flashcard drill • use manipulatives • singing with the music • sight singing using solfege or hand signals • improvisation through musical stories • computer games to reinforce theory concepts • classes with peers to share musical experiences • technical routine • composing simple tunes (p.80)
Comment: It is interesting that these "learning experiences" are listed as something that are supplementary and not as activities related to reinforcing music reading. These "learning experiences" should be seen as necessary for music reading development rather than something "extra"
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
None
Professional Piano Teaching Vol. 1 2nd Ed., Jacobson (2015)
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES
Beginners should start with an aural image of sound and music before reading staff notation (p. 60)
Teach familiar tunes by ear (p.61-62)
Teach pieces by rote (provides extensive guidelines) (p.62-63)
Reinforce high and low sounds at the keyboard (p.66)
Reinforce the music alphabet through cards to arrange in order, play games with black and white keys (provides example games) (p.66)
While playing have students point and chant direction or say finger numbers (p.67)

Have students play on the keyboard cover while chanting finger numbers (p.67)
Facilitate reading by contour with flashcards that contain patterns of notes slightly changed from each other. Students identify the one that was played (p.67)
Use shorter sight reading flashcards to review concepts the student is currently learning (p.67)
Reading can be facilitated by assigning several pieces at the same level that include familiar concepts and skills (p.129)
Dedicate time each lesson to reading games, transposing and hearing the results of daily sight-reading assignments (p.129)
Use flashcards that have simple sentences written vertically on the staff to drill vertical reading (p.131)
At the beginning help students visualize the keyboard topography by having the students play simple exercises of steps or skips called out by the teacher with their eyes closed or looking at the keyboard (p.132)
Includes strategies for finger numbers, intervals and directions, and note names with examples (p.132-134)
Contains a list of 5 strategies for helping students keep their eyes on the page (p.134)
Contains a section on developing the ear in relation to music reading and provides a list of 5 strategies (p. 135-136)
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
Reviews note reading approaches (p.35-38)
Includes criteria for selecting a beginner method book (p.44-55)
Advocates for the use of pre-staff reading (p.67)
Encourage reading by patterns (p.72)
The primary role of beginning reading is to build a memory bank of patterns and symbols that will be recognized in new surroundings (p.129)
Provides a section on reading difficulties (p.129-130)

Beginning reading instruction should focus on the student visualizing the keyboard (p.132)
Includes a section on using transposing to reinforce music reading skills with examples (p.137-138)
Contains an extensive music reading summary at the end of chapter 5 (p.139-140)
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
Use flashcard drills and have students write notes on lines and in spaces (p.68)
Ask the student to write a melody using whole notes on the staff lines without clefs (p.68)
Use sight reading flashcards (provides examples) some with one clef and some with the grand staff (p.69)
Play Simon-Says style games to reinforce finger numbers (p.70)
If students are using a landmark reading approach they should circle the landmark notes in a piece and relate the other notes to the landmarks (p.71)
Use flashcards to drill notes on the grand staff where students name the note and play it. This should be reviewed at the lesson and at home (p.72)
Ask students to name and play a page of notes written randomly on both clefs (p.72)
Encourage intervallic reading in and out of positions (p.76)
Students should follow a systematic sight reading routine that encourages good reading habits and offers 8 steps for students to follow (p.136)
Comment: Beginner reading strategies are presented in the context of sight reading
Inspired Piano Teaching, Blickenstaff (2024)
SPECIFIC BEGINNER MUSIC READING TEACHING STRATEGIES
Describes “A Trip Around the Hand” exercise to reinforce intervallic reading (p. 46 and 102)
Use supplementary reading books to reinforce reading (p. 101)
Use flashcards with three to five pitches, steps/skips (p. 101-102)

Transpose five-finger pieces (p. 103)
Have students name notes in relation to the nearest landmark note (p. 103)
GENERAL MUSIC READING COMMENTS
Explains Frances Clark's reading method using pre-staff notation (p. 98-99)
Discusses landmark reading from various starting positions (p. 99-100)
Playing one or two new pieces each week is insufficient to build reading skill (p. 105)
SIGHT READING STRATEGIES
Provides eight sight reading steps (p.104)
Sight read duets with students (p. 105)
Find ways your students can sight read daily each week of the year (p. 105)

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