

Spotlight on YBDT - Bridging the Gap

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Let's be honest, there's a generation gap in our profession. Brand-new directors may start at the bottom of the food chain in a six-member band staff. These directors may spend their day coordinating electronics on the sideline, inputting music into *Finale* or listening to podcasts. On the other hand, there are master teachers who began their careers as the one and only director in a pre-internet world. These directors drove to neighboring towns to meet with friends, talk shop or receive comments on recordings of their bands. Their vision of what *could be* built Texas bands into the highly competitive and thriving activity that it is today. When you consider the changes in technology, public education, and music over the past fifty years, that pesky generation gap begins to feel more like an abyss.

In Summer 2017, I enrolled in a discussion-based graduate course with Dr. Keith Dye at Texas Tech University entitled, "Topics and Issues in Texas Band Education." Contrary to what you may expect, this was not an all-out venting session or a prescribed study of standards and repertoire. We covered many topics, perspectives, and even hosted video conferences with individuals like Brad Kent and Kay Vanlandingham. Due partially to the fact that all students in this course were female band directors in their first five years of teaching, a trend began

to form in our weekly discussions. We acknowledged that many young directors longed for guidance from others, but did not know how to find a mentor relationship or how to ask the right questions. Even more pressing, we recognized that so many brilliant and experienced band directors wanted to help others, but felt that their input wasn't desired or they weren't able to connect with younger directors in a way that was productive. These misgivings are not only standing in the way of progress, but are increasing the risk of band director burnout.

Young Band Directors of Texas started as a final project for grad school, but it has grown into so much more. Research for the project led to discussions with young band directors across the state about what would help them "stay in the game." When asked to identify the most applicable category of support, young directors responded unanimously with "all of them!"

Help me with pedagogy, finances, health/wellness, mentorship, and work-life balance. Give me someone I can text when my rehearsal goes poorly, someone who knows what it's like to live alone in a dilapidated apartment, or maybe even a group of people who understand my lifestyle and passion.

In an attempt to meet these needs, a final project turned into a professional

organization. In less than a year, YBDT boasts over 600 followers on Facebook. We have written articles, shared resources, hosted social events, led an online challenge group, and launched an early version of our virtual clinician program. We have a committee member representing each of the five regions: North, East, South, West, and Central Texas. These efforts are simply the tip of the iceberg when it comes to how we can best serve the newest recruits of our profession. This is an organization created for young band directors by young band directors. Our mission is to support our members in their first few years, so that they may serve as mentors to others and find a way to do what they love for as long as possible.

Looking toward the future, we are eager to partner with the Texas Bandmasters Association. The leadership of TBA has made it clear that they are dedicated to minimizing the generation gap and building connections among all band directors. With two YBDT clinics and a reception scheduled, the 2018 TBA Convention/Clinic is just the beginning. We look forward to getting young directors more involved with TBA—guiding them to use all available resources and finding innovative ways to communicate and grow. With the wealth of knowledge and expertise that exists among the ranks of today's music educators, we must embrace the needs of those around us and do everything in our power to help foster a lifelong love of music in them and their students.