Taylor and I decided to choose the television show, The Wonder Years for our teacher leader video. Our particular episode originally aired on March, 7th, 1989 and was directed by Steven Miner. The writers for the show were Carol Black, who was also the creator of the show, and Matthew Carlson. Of the many characters in the show, the few that had a major role in the clip we are going to show are: Fred Savage as “Kevin”; Denis Arndt as “Mr. Tyler”; Raye Birk as “Mr. Diperna”; and Josh Saviano as “Paul”. The whole episode is roughly 27 minutes in length, however our clip comes in just under ten. Since this show was made and aired during the time where there were no T.V. ratings, this show was not rated by any once source. After researching the show and this particular episode further, however, we were able to find that the viewer’s rated this episode an 8.7/10.

The Wonder Years is a show that depicts the lives of a group of suburban kids and their families during the 60’s and 70’s. Our episode is set during the Vietnam War in a time where students back home were struggling to come to grips with what was occurring overseas. Kevin, Fred Savage, joins a student council group that wants to protest the war in Vietnam. The advisor for this group, Mr. Tyler, is seen as the “cool teacher,” who drove a motorcycle and understood kids. Kevin and Paul, however, only selected the walk out group because it had a short line to sign up for, and then they noticed that Mr. Tyler was the advisor. The clip takes us through the walk out group’s meetings and how they work to figure out just what it is they are going to do. The group thinks they have some good ideas but they are met with some adversity when the principal, Mr. Diperna, informs them of the school policy about walking out of class and the resulting consequences. The students seek out advice from Mr. Tyler as he emerges as a wise, thought-provoking, insightful, challenging, advocate for student’s rights. Mr. Tyler shows the students that it is ok to think and act independently and on what you believe in, regardless of what the principal, our antagonist who is very straight and narrow about following the letter of the law, says and threatens them with.

Since the studio he has yet to release this series out to the public for purchase, the bootlegged copies which I own are rather poor in quality. Regardless of that fact, the show, and in particular, this episode, demonstrates a lot of teacher leader qualities that we have discussed in class and seen in our readings. Three of the leadership qualities that we believe Mr. Tyler exemplifies all work together and play into one another. They are: honesty, respect, and integrity. Most of the students, we get the impression at least, look up to Mr. Tyler for his ability to tell it like it is, be open and honest, and stand by you through thick and thin. When students can trust Mr. Tyler in this way, they want to do their best to listen and succeed to make him happy and proud. While this small group in the video have come to Mr. Tyler from different backgrounds and for different reasons, they all share the same impression of Mr. Tyler and his character. He is honest with the students, respects their opinions and ideas, and shows he is willing to go to bat for them with the ideas that they are coming up with. In doing this, his students show him the respect that he deserves, are honest with him, and in their own way, show their integrity through their determination and drive to be independent thinkers and doers.

The last two teacher leader qualities we found in Mr. Tyler were compassion and empathy. We have all had, hopefully, at least one teacher that showed on a daily basis, and how much they cared for us and our classmates. Mr. Tyler, who even when he was belittled by his principal in front of his students, still showed how much his job meant to him and how much cared about his students and what they wanted to achieve. His compassion drove him and his students to fight through the adversity that was in front of them and to find solutions to the problems as opposed to excuses for not being able to do it. His empathetic demeanor challenged students to do their best because they knew they would have the support and backing from Mr. Tyler. He felt the same way they did and wanted to prove to them that they could accomplish their goal with the hard work they were putting in and the support of those who you could trust.

The portrayal of Mr. Tyler strikes at the heart of what many teachers seek to do: have a strong connection with their students, educate them on relevant issues, get them to think critically, and make educated decisions. But, like many teachers, Mr. Tyler is also limited in what he is able to do. He is bound within the rules of the school, as well as those that are set by the principal. Many teachers would like to be how Mr. Tyler is portrayed in this episode of the Wonder Years, but feel restrained (just as he is) in their ability to achieve this.

Teachers often find themselves in difficult situations where they are forced to teach, mentor, and counsel students in what must feel like one hand being tied behind their back. Where they can help themselves is by working to find a balance within a system that sometimes restricts them in order to help their students. In Mr. Tyler’s case, his first success was simply being available to his students. They knew they could count on him to listen and advise them, and that is something that many teachers can do, regardless of what other rules may be in place. From the perspective of the viewer, one may come away from this episode of The Wonder Years with the idea and the mindset that teachers can indeed make a strong difference in the lives of their students, and they are shown one way in which this can happen. This is very true, and while it can sometimes be a challenge, it is also an incredibly important and crucial role for educators.

Discussion Questions

* What are some of the teacher qualities demonstrated by Mr. Tyler? (Integrity, Honesty, Respect, Compassion and Empathy)
* Why do you suppose the students responded so well to Mr. Tyler and his methods?
* After watching this clip, what can classroom teachers or educators take away from Mr. Tyler’s style?