This narrative inquiry case study brings the voices of mentor teachers into the discourse of teacher preparation. In a series of interviews, mentor teachers discuss the challenges faced by student teachers, the pedagogical content knowledge needed to teach secondary ELA, and the relationship between secondary schools and universities.

The first theme explores the challenges that are faced by student teachers. Mentor teachers spoke about the difficulty of making the transition from student to secondary teacher and learning how to put theory into practice in their classrooms. They also considered the challenge of student teachers engaging diverse groups of students. The second theme addresses the pedagogical content knowledge needed to teach secondary ELA, focusing on the teaching of literature and the teaching of writing.
Mentor teachers felt that student teachers needed more strategies for the teaching of literature. They also believed that student teachers were in need of further instruction in grammar and the mechanics of language, as they found that many student teachers were unable to teach grammatical structures to secondary students. The third theme focuses on classroom management. Mentor teachers all felt that classroom management skills were best learned through practice, and they took on the responsibility to teach classroom management through observation and active learning. The fourth theme, disposition, aligns with NCATE’s standards on teacher dispositions. The mentor teachers used the term “teachable spirit” to describe the ideal student teacher as being an active learner and reflective practitioner who is open to feedback and focused on growth and learning. Finally, the fifth theme that emerged is the need for greater communication between the university and the secondary schools. Mentor teachers invited university instructors into their classrooms and hoped that time spent in secondary schools could initiate conversations about teacher preparation and collaboration between institutions.

At the heart of this project is a desire to empower mentor teachers, whose voices are often missing from scholarship about teacher preparation. This study can give English educators and mentor teachers common ground, fostering connections between the colleges who prepare new teachers and the schools in which they will teach.