



The Rise of the United Farm Workers Union:

A Study of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement

Goals 2000 - Partnerships for
Educating Colorado Students

In Partnership with the **Denver Public Schools**
and the **Metropolitan State College of Denver**

El Alma de la Raza Project



The Rise of the United Farm Workers Union:

A Study of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement

By Jon Kuhns

Grades 8-10

Implementation Time

for Unit of Study: 2-3 weeks

**Goals 2000 - Partnerships for
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El Alma de la Raza Curriculum
and Teacher Training Project**

Loyola A. Martinez, Project Director

The Rise of the United Farm Workers Union: A Study of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement

Unit Concepts

- The California grape farm workers' struggle for basic human rights
- The roles of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta in the creation of United Farm Workers Union (UFW)
- The role of Teatro Campesino in the UFW movement
- Local effects of the farm workers movement

Standards Addressed by This Unit

Reading and Writing

Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)

Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences. (RW2)

Students write and speak using formal grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. (RW3)

Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. (RW4)

Students read, locate, select, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technological sources. (RW5)

Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience (RW6)

History

Students understand the chronological organization of history and know how to organize events and people into major eras to identify and explain historical relationships. (H1)

Students understand how science, technology, and economic activity have developed, changed, and affected societies throughout history. (H4)

Geography

Students understand how economic, political, cultural, and social processes interact to shape patterns of human populations, interdependence, cooperation, and conflict. (G4)

Introduction

This unit is designed as a survey of the California grape farm workers' struggle for basic human rights. In 1960 grape workers were making \$2.00 a day, working eleven to twelve hours. These workers did not have access to drinkable water or any type of bathroom. The workers were also forced to work in vineyards that were sprayed with poisonous pesticides. Farm workers' children had few educational opportunities and often ended up working rather than going to school. Because of these conditions, migrant farm workers led difficult lives with little hope of success. The life expectancy of a migrant farm worker in the 1960s was only 40 years.

Many times workers would be fired if they complained or tried to organize themselves to improve their working conditions. Because there was an abundance of workers, most attempts at organizing failed. However in 1962, Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta began to recruit and organize farm workers into the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA). These efforts led farm workers into a five-year strike and grape boycott against grape growers. In the end, the strike and boycott led grape growers to sign union contracts with the farm workers who named their union the United Farm Workers Union (UFW).

The establishment of the UFW gave farm workers an official voice in their struggle for equal rights and allowed them to improve their working conditions in many ways.

Implementation Guidelines

This unit is designed for eighth grade social studies classes, but it can be adapted for use in classes up to the 10th grade level. Pre-teaching is advisable for any lesson that contains instructional strategies that are unfamiliar to your students.

Instructional Materials and Resources

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|----------|--|
| Lesson 1 | <i>The Latino Experience in U.S History</i> , Stephen Lewin, editor |
| Lesson 2 | <i>The Struggle in the Fields</i> (PBS documentary) |
| Lesson 3 | <i>Cesar Chavez: A Triumph of Spirit</i> by Griswold del Castillo and Garcia |
| Lesson 4 | "The Circuit" by Francisco Jimenez |
| Lesson 5 | Internet access |
| Lesson 6 | Internet access |

Lesson Summary

- Lesson 1 La Causa: The Beginning of the United Farm Workers Union (UFW).
Establishing the dates and chronological order of events in the formation of the UFW.
- Lesson 2 *The Struggle in the Fields*
An overview of the UFW based on the PBS documentary.
- Lesson 3 Dolores Huerta
A look at the woman who cofounded the UFW.
- Lesson 4 Life as a Migrant Worker
Reading “The Circuit” by Francisco Jimenez.
- Lesson 5 Teatro Campesino
An opportunity to create a campesino theater.
- Lesson 6 Internet Research
An examination of the personalities involved in the UFW struggle.
- Lesson 7
(Extended) How Did the Farm Workers Movement Affect Your Community?
Interviewing a member of your community that was involved in the United Farm Workers movement.

Lesson 1: La Causa—The Beginning of the United Farm Workers Union (UFW)

What will the students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students understand the chronological organization of history and know how to organize events and people into major eras to identify and explain historical relationships. (H1)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students use chronology to organize historical events and people.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will learn the sequence of events that brought about the establishment of the United Farm Workers Union.

SPECIFICS

The rise of the UFW began in California in 1962 when Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta began to organize farm workers to achieve better living and working conditions. In 1965 the UFW began the five-year Delano grape strike and boycott. Due to the efforts of Chavez and Huerta, the UFW grew strong and today continues to support farm workers.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Meaningful vocabulary instruction

Guided reading

Timeline

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

The *Jump Start* reading program uses a flash card strategy for vocabulary development. On one side of the card, students write the word then after defining the word they draw a picture that represents the meaning of that word. On the other side of the card the students and teacher work together to write a “student-friendly” definition. The student will also label what part of speech the word is and then write a complete sentence using the word. For more information contact The Denver Public Schools Literacy Program. Additionally, the teacher should preview pages 282–287 of *The Latino Experience in U.S. History* and create a key for the timeline.

ACTIVITIES

With the teacher, create flash cards for the four vocabulary words. Read the first two pages of Chapter 22 of *The Latino Experience in U.S. History* with the teacher. Next, with the teacher leading, fill in the first two entries on the timeline. In small groups, as you read pages 284–287, complete the rest of the entries on the timeline.

Lesson 1 (cont.)

VOCABULARY

braceros	Farm workers brought in from Mexico under a 1951 U.S. government program. Striking farm workers were often replaced by braceros. The word “braceros” comes from the Spanish word “abrazo,” which means “arm.”
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations. The AFL-CIO is the largest union in the United States.
huelga	Spanish word for “strike.” This was the cry of the United Farm Workers.
La Causa	Spanish for “the cause.” This is the name the farm workers gave to their movement.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Jump Start: A Reading Program published by Denver Public Schools

The Latino Experience in U.S. History published by Globe Fearon

Timeline Worksheet

ASSESSMENT

Informal assessment of students’ timelines using timeline key.

Timeline Worksheet

Directions: First determine the year that corresponds with the event and write it in the first column of Table 2. Then organize the events in Table 2 into correct chronological order. Write a “1” in the column titled, “Order of Events” for the first event, a “2” for the second, and so on. Then write the key words noted in Table 2 next to the date in the timeline of Table 1.

Table 1: Events Timeline

Date	Events (using underlined key words from Table 2)
1954	
1962	
1964	
1965	
1966	
1968	
1970	
1972	

Table 2: List of Events

Year of Event	Order of Events	Event Descriptions (with underlined key words)
		<u>Chavez</u> finally agrees with Doctors’ demands and <u>ends his fast</u> in an emotional meeting with Robert Kennedy in which they prayed.
		<u>Chavez leads</u> farm workers on a <u>300-mile march</u> from Delano to Sacramento. A huge rally is held at the Capitol with over 10,000 farm workers in attendance.
		In a period of two months <u>Chavez</u> assists more than 4,000 farm workers to become registered voters. Then he is <u>fired</u> from his farm worker job for trying to organize a union.
		Dolores Huerta joins Cesar Chavez and the National Farm Workers Association (<u>NFWA</u>) <u>is founded</u> .
		Cesar <u>Chavez joins</u> the Community Service Organization (<u>CSO</u>).
		<u>Vineyard owners</u> in Delano <u>recognize</u> the United Farm Worker’s Union (<u>UFW</u>).
		<u>Filipino farm workers</u> go on <u>strike</u> at a vineyard near Delano.
		Cesar <u>Chavez resigns</u> from the <u>CSO</u> because the delegates voted down his request to form a union.
		Cesar <u>Chavez moves</u> to Delano and begins to organize farm workers in the NFWA. Protests by the CSO and other groups force the <u>end of the Bracero Program</u> by the <u>U.S. Government</u> .
		<u>Chavez</u> , fearing that the strike might become violent, <u>begins a fast</u> in hopes of maintaining peaceful demonstrations.
		The <u>AFL-CIO grants</u> a charter to the farmers’ union that results in a <u>new name</u> for the <u>union</u> , The United Farm Workers (<u>UFW</u>).

Lesson 2: *The Struggle in the Fields*

What will the students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. (RW4)
Students understand how science, technology, and economic activity have developed, changed, and affected societies throughout history. (H4)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students will make predictions, analyze, draw conclusions, and discriminate between fact and opinion in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing.

Students understand how economic factors have influenced historical events.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will expand their understanding of the development of the United Farm Workers Union as they view and analyze the PBS documentary *The Struggle in the Fields*.

SPECIFICS

The PBS documentary *The Struggle in the Fields* provides a detailed account of the formation of the UFW during the Delano strike and grape boycott.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Analyzing

Summarizing

Discussing

Drawing Conclusions

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

Teacher should preview the PBS documentary *The Struggle in the Fields* and prepare answers for the questions in the Lesson 2 Worksheet.

ACTIVITIES

As a group, view the PBS documentary *The Struggle in the Fields*. As you view the documentary, individually answer the items on the Lesson 2 Worksheet. Finally, the teacher will lead a discussion about your analysis of the documentary.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

The Struggle in the Fields (video)

reproduced copies of Lesson 2 Worksheet

ASSESSMENT

Accurate completion of Lesson 2 Worksheet.

Lesson 2 Worksheet

1. Describe the overall conditions of California farm workers in the early 1960s. What were their lives like? What type of wages did they earn? Where did they live? What type of education did their children receive?
2. What effect did the end of the Bracero Program in 1964 produce for labor organizers?
3. Before the Filipino strike, what had been the plan of the UFWA?
4. What consequences did workers face if they decided to strike?
5. Describe Cesar Chavez's physical appearance.

Lesson 3: Dolores Huerta

What will the students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students write and speak using formal grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. (RW3)

Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience. (RW6)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students will use correct sentence structure in writing and demonstrate correct punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

Students will read literature to understand places, people, events, and vocabulary, both familiar and unfamiliar.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will understand Dolores Huerta's involvement in the rise of the UFW.

SPECIFICS

Dolores Huerta is a woman that lives in the borderlands of ethnicity and gender. She is Hispanic, but is far from being a traditional Hispanic woman. She is also a woman who is fighting for human rights in a movement that predominately involved males. It is Dolores' powerful character that allowed her to be the key organizer and negotiator in the rise of the UFW union.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Meaningful vocabulary instruction

Brainstorming

Guided reading

Writing in the content area

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

In order to prepare students for the reading assignment, the teacher may choose to involve the students in a brainstorming activity designed to draw upon the students' prior knowledge of the traditional Latina lifestyle.

ACTIVITIES

With the teacher, create *Jump Start* flash cards for the vocabulary words. Then, under the direction of the teacher, read pages 59–75 in *Cesar Chavez: A Triumph of Spirit*. After reading, imagine you are a newspaper reporter and you have been given the assignment to write a one-to-two-page article about Dolores Huerta. In this article you must describe who she is and what she did to help create the United Farm Workers Union. In your article, include an analysis of why she is different from traditional Latinas.

Lesson 3 (cont.)

VOCABULARY

egalitarian	Philosophy or belief that all people are equal
symbiotic	Relationship of mutual dependence
anomalies	Departures from regular rules or agreements

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

A Triumph of Spirit by Richard Griswold Del Castillo and Richard A. Garcia

ASSESSMENT

Written essay using correct grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

Lesson 4: Life as a Migrant Worker

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience. (RW6)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students will read literature to understand places, people, events, and vocabulary, both familiar and unfamiliar.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will expand their understanding of migrant workers by reading and discussing a story about a migrant worker family.

SPECIFICS

“The Circuit” by Francisco Jimenez describes the life of a young farm worker boy. The story illustrates his family’s migrant life and his return to school after harvest time.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Guided reading

Questioning

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

The teacher may wish to re-review the PBS documentary *The Struggle in the Fields* prior to working with the students in order to prepare a list of words that describes migrant workers.

ACTIVITIES

With your teacher, make a list of words that describe the migrant workers you saw in the documentary *The Struggle in the Fields* during Lesson 2. Following this activity, you will be divided into small groups to read “The Circuit” by Francisco Jimenez. You will then rejoin the large group to discuss the story and the list of words you prepared with your teacher.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

“The Circuit” by Francisco Jimenez

ASSESSMENT

Informal questioning on “The Circuit”; comprehension, recall, retelling.

Lesson 5: Teatro Campesino

What will the students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences. (RW2)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students will prepare written and oral presentations using strategies.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will write and perform small presentations to understand the significance of the Teatro Campesino in the UFW movement.

SPECIFICS

Theatro Campesino or Campesino Theater was used by the organizers of the UFW to humorously illustrate the experiences of workers who worked in the vineyards. The theater was effective because it portrayed the workers' difficult conditions in nonthreatening ways.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Student directed

Paired groups

Acting

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

The teacher may want to review the Teatro Campesino by having students, in pairs, obtain information from the Internet. Type in the URL <http://www.ufw.org> and click on *Theatro Campesino*. This URL gives a description and history of the use of theater in the UFW movement.

ACTIVITIES

Working together in groups of approximately two to three, write a script for a Teatro Campesino skit. Your skit should be approximately 7 to 10 minutes long and should bring out the difficult conditions the farm workers faced. You will be given time to rehearse your skits. Each group will present their skits for the class.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Internet access

ASSESSMENT

Presentation of skit in Teatro Campesino format.

Lesson 6: Internet Research

What will the students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students read to locate, select, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technological sources. (RW5)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students will select relevant material for reading, writing, and speaking purposes.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will use the Internet to research the different personalities and groups involved in the farm labor dispute.

What will be done to help the students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Determining importance in text

Student directed

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

The teacher should review the procedure for logging on and off the Internet. For some classes, it might be more efficient for the teacher to bookmark the URLs to be used in this lesson. The teacher should also note that the biography section of the Chicano Homepage will serve as an excellent resource for the students during their research.

ACTIVITIES

First, the teacher will divide students into two Internet research teams to study either the farmers or the farm workers involved in the labor dispute. Within these teams, students will work in groups of three to research a certain person or group of people. The information obtained will be used in a role-play activity that is the unit assessment. Use the following URLs to locate information about the different personalities and groups. Look for information about who the person or group was, how they were involved in the labor dispute, and the stand they took concerning the farm laborers. Give special attention to the arguments they made and the reasons behind their arguments. After completing their research, each small group will write a well organized, detailed description of the people studied. Then each team will compile the information into a comprehensive description of the farmers or the farm workers.

Lesson 6 (cont.)

Groups and Personalities in the Farm Workers Dispute

Farm Workers and Allies:

Cesar Chavez
Dolores Huerta
UFW members

Farm Owners and Allies:

vineyard owners
John Gimarra
Lionel Steinberg
bracero worker

URLs

<http://www.ufw.org>
<http://www.pbs.org/chicano>
<http://cnet.ucr.edu>
<http://www.smartwine.org>

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Internet access

ASSESSMENT

Assess students' written descriptions for content, detail, and grammatical correctness.

Lesson 7 (Extended): How Did the Farm Workers Movement Affect Your Community?

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students understand how science, technology, and economic activity have developed, changed, and affected societies throughout history. (H4)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students understand how economic factors have influenced historical events.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will understand how the United Farm Worker Movement has affected their communities.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Investigating

Retelling

Interviewing

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

For some classes, it might be useful to have a list of names of people the students can interview. To make this list, the teacher may try calling the local AFL-CIO for possible contacts. The teacher may also contact a local newspaper and ask them to run a query to identify local Mexican-Americans who were involved in the UFW Movement. (In Denver, try the bilingual newspaper *La Voz*, 303-936-8556.)

For students who need note-taking practice, a pre-activity might involve students practicing note-taking while doing a mock interview with the teacher. To make a clear and concise oral history, it is advisable for students to prepare rough and final drafts of their articles.

ACTIVITIES

Individually, write interview questions that you will use to interview a person from your community who was involved in the United Farm Workers Movement. You will use your notes from the interview you conducted to write a one page article about the person you interviewed and how the UFW Movement affected your community. Remember to use grammatically correct language in your article. Prepare a rough and a final draft of your article.

ASSESSMENT

Article written with grammatically correct language.

Unit Assessment

How will students demonstrate proficiency?

PERFORMANCE TASK

In small groups, divided based on your roles, use your Internet research and Role Play Sheets 1 and 2 to prepare for a mock meeting between farm workers and organizers, and grape growers and owners. Under the teacher's direction, participate in the negotiations and hopefully arrive at a compromise that is beneficial for all parties involved.

For the role-play activity, the teacher should meet with each small group to make sure they know what their role should be in the meeting and what points they would like to stress during the negotiations. It is also important that the teacher direct the negotiation meeting so that all parties have an equal opportunity to express their views and the debate runs smoothly.

Before the students begin the role-play they should be given the scoring rubric so they understand the criteria against which they will be evaluated. During the activity, the teacher should use the scoring rubric to evaluate each student's contribution. After the role-play each student will also do a self-evaluation using the scoring rubric.

SCORING RUBRIC (for teacher and student evaluation of participation in the role-play activity)

Part 1 Preparation for Role-Play

4. Student has well organized, research-based information including many quotes, facts, and figures to be used to represent their position during the role-play activity.
3. Student has organized research including one or two quotes, facts, and figures to represent their position during the role-play activity.
2. Student has limited research ready to use during the role-play activity.
1. Student has very limited or no research ready to use during the role play activity.

Part 2 Participation in Role-Play

4. Student participates in role-play activity, clearly and creatively presenting arguments using specific facts to back up their viewpoint.
3. Student participates in role-play activity by presenting arguments and using general information to support their viewpoint.
2. Student participates in role-play activity by making isolated comments to support their viewpoint.
1. Student does not participate in role-play activity

Role-Play Sheet 1: Farm Workers

Currently, you are on strike against the grape growers. You have established a grape boycott to protest the grape growers inhumane working conditions.

What you are protesting?

- The denial of your right to form a union
- An unfair wage (\$1.60 per hour)
- The growers' use of harmful pesticides that can seriously affect farm workers
- The lack of education that your children receive
- Long work days (10–12 hours during harvest)
- Unhealthy working conditions (no bathrooms and no pure drinking water)
- The growers are giving jobs to bracero workers

What you are demanding from growers?

- Sign a union contract that allows workers to form a union
- Increase the farm workers' wages to at least \$2.00 per hour
- Provide clean bathrooms and pure drinking water at every location
- Stop using bracero workers
- Contribute to your children's education
- Improve living conditions

Role-Play Sheet 2: Grape Growers

Your workers have been striking and encouraging others to boycott your grapes. The farm union organizers have been stirring up the workers so that now they are making unrealistic demands.

What you are claiming?

Already this year you have raised their wages from \$1.20 per hour to \$1.60 per hour. These people have chosen this form of work and it is not your fault that they are poor.

The price of grapes is already so low that a drastic wage increase would cause many growers to go bankrupt.

Your ancestors were also immigrants and they had to start out poor and bare-handed and make a go of it. No one was there to help them.

You are willing to sit down with your workers but the labor organizers are stirring up the people and they don't really represent your workers.

The strikers have violated injunctions by protesting on your property and not allowing bracero workers to enter and work.

The union's boycott is destroying the grape industry. If they don't stop, the industry won't survive.

What you are demanding?

No further wage increases this year

Union agitators leave your workers alone so you can sit down with your own workers

Strikers stop violating injunctions by striking on your property

Workers end their strike and boycott before the grape industry is destroyed

Bibliography

Chicana/o Latina/o Communication Through Networking (CLNET) Homepage. Date unknown. Website: <http://cnet.ucr.edu/women/huerta/readings.html>

Extensive bibliography of readings about Dolores Huerta.

Famous People Units, Utah State University, Department of Education Home Page. Website: http://teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/resources/ed_lesson_plans/famous/huerta.html

Educational resources about Dolores Huerta, including a bibliography, learning objectives, procedures, and assessment. Includes several useful web links.

Felner, Julie, "Woman of the Year: Dolores Huerta." *Ms.* (January/February 1998).

This article can be found under *Additional Links* in the UFW home page. (<http://www.ufw.org>). Describes Dolores Huerta's life work.

Griswold del Castillo, Richard and Richard A. Garcia. *Cesar Chavez: A Triumph of Spirit*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995.

Chapter Four of this book describes Dolores Huerta and gives insight about her person.

International Union's Home Page. Website: <http://www.uaw.org/special/women/women5.html>

Dolores Huerta's involvement with the UFW, including her police and FBI records.

Lewin, Stephen, Ed. *The Latino Experience in U.S. History*. Paramus, New Jersey: Globe Fearon, 1994.

This textbook provides a summary of Latino-American history.

Lindop, Laurie. *Champions of Equality*. New York: Twenty First Century Books, 1997.

Describes Dolores Huerta's early life and an account of the Delano Strike.

Public Broadcast Service (PBS) Special Home Page. *Chicano (a documentary)*, 1996. Website: <http://www.pbs.org/chicano>

Contains resources for teachers and students, as well as numerous Web links.

Rochman, Hazel and Darlene Z. McCampbell. *Leaving Home Stories*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997.

Contains "The Circuit" by Francisco Jimenez, a wonderful short story describing a boy's life as a migrant worker.

Smart Wine Home Page. Website: <http://www.smartwine.org>

Once you are on the homepage, double click on *Search*. Then type "United Farm Workers." The first cover story gives a growers perspective of the current UFW strawberry and grape boycotts (taken from *Wine Business Monthly*, November 1997). Listed below the cover story are several other articles regarding Latinos that also might be of interest.

The Struggle in the Fields. PBS, 1996. 57 minutes.

Video describing the organization of the United Farm Workers Union and the Delano Grape Strike.

United Farm Workers (UFW) Home Page. Website: <http://www.ufw.org>

This is an excellent resource for studying the UFW in provides an extensive review of UFW history, including sections on Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta.

About the Author

Jon Kuhns was born in Parker, Colorado and graduated from Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado, with a bachelors degree in Sociology and Human Services and a Secondary Social Studies Teaching Certificate. Following his initial college experience, Jon completed a minor in Spanish from Aurora Community College, a two month Berlitz Conversational Spanish Course in Washington, D.C., a two-month Intensive Emerson Spanish Course in Antigua, Guatemala, and a three year Residency in Honduras.

While in Honduras, Jon served as a teacher and administrative director of a technical institute for boys who had dropped out of public school. Jon also implemented a loan program for adult subsistence farmers and taught the basic economic principles of financial planning and loan repayment.

In the past three years Jon has taught in the Denver Public Schools and the Parker and Grand County school districts, and has taught English as a Second Language (ESL) courses for Spanish-speaking adults in Denver. He is currently a Denver Public Schools Social Studies teacher at the Florence Crittenton School for pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers.