“Teaching Theories”

This activity could be used in a college course, or possibly even high school. To demonstrate, in a classroom setting, some key differences between language learning approaches, you can simulate two different styles in about a half hour to an hour lesson. This will be focused on reading.

1) Pick a language none of your students know. It should be a language the instructor does not know either.

2) Gather two sets of materials. In the first set you will need a list of the alphabet of that language and a list of the sounds associated with the letters. In the second set you should collect some YouTube videos or other free online media which may include songs, stories, and so forth in which words are scrolling as words are being spoken. Singalongs work well. It is best if there are pictures or definitions as well.

3) Divide the class into two groups. The first group will be drilled on the letters and sounds. They should be told to practice reading because they will be required to read in this language later in the class period. They should spend around 20–25 minutes memorizing the letter–sound relationships. The second group will watch a story or music video or singalong. They will also be told they will read when they come back, so they should focus on the words and their meanings. Even though they are not given a full translation, they should have some hints to help (e.g. pictures, actions, flash cards with the words and pictures). They should have 20–25 minutes to review the songs and videos.

4) When the groups come back together, one or two people from each group will be given the text from the song/movie and will be asked to read and explain the text.

What should happen here is that the ones who have received the letter–sound correspondence training may be able to sound out the text. The other group, however, should have some idea of how to say the words and have a basic understanding of the meaning. The first group will likely sound very choppy as they say each word whereas the other group will have little clue on how to actually sound out the words, but might sound even more “fluent.”

As an example, look at the stories at the following website: http://www.bookbox.com/.

You can pick a story in several different languages, and then use this for Group 2. Transcribe the actual text for the reading test at the end.