

## Learning to teach

Parents get tools to make sure kids learn while at home

By LISA MICHALS

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Jeannie Eidson, left, and Tracy Goodwin share details about themselves and their children during classes at Parent University at Crane Creek Community Center.



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Class instructor Victoria Dixon-Mokeba shows two books class participants will receive at Parent University. In all, parents receive more than 12 free books.

Important lessons in parenting:

- Sometimes, correcting children's mistakes can be counterproductive.
- When children get older, parents shouldn't stop reading aloud to them.
- And those pictures that just look like multicolored scribbles? Congratulations. Your child is taking his or her first steps toward literacy.

Parenting classes — called Parenting University — at Crane Creek Community Center aim to bolster parents' teaching know-how so they can make sure their children keep learning after the school day ends.

"It's very important because sometimes in the school setting, you take for granted that parents just know how to help their children at home," said Victoria Dixon-Mokeba, lead teacher at Carolina School for Inquiry.

Dixon-Mokeba, whose charter school is housed in the community center, donates her time to teach the courses.

The Richland County Recreation Commission received a Sisters of Charity Foundation grant that funds the series of seven monthly classes. Free child-care and snacks are available during the classes, and parents receive more than 12 free books.

The classes are free, too, and open to anyone — it doesn't matter whether people live in the Crane Creek area or where their children attend school.

"Because of the demographics of the area and just knowing South Carolina ... we know that there's a great need for parent involvement," said Linda Carter, a recreation commission deputy executive director.

Felicia Venable, a mother of four, signed up for the classes because her youngest son is learning to read. "He's very interested (in reading) and I want to keep him interested," she said.

At a recent class, Dixon-Mokeba talked about how parents can fuel motivation.

For example, young children who are still learning the alphabet or starter words can get a jump-start on literacy by singing songs. Many children memorize their favorite songs, and parents can write the lyrics and show children what the words look like as they sing.

Another pointer Dixon-Mokeba offered was a little more subtle. If a child spells a word wrong or pronounces something incorrectly, parents should resist the urge to say it was wrong. "Don't say, 'Oh you didn't do that right,'" Dixon-Mokeba said. "Then they're not going to be willing to take risks as writers and as readers."

Also, children's early scribbles and seemingly unintelligible drawings are some of their first experiments with literacy. It's important to encourage those activities and show children how important you think their creations are.

Dixon-Mokeba showed a collage of scribbles her son had colored. "This picture means something to him," she said.

It's best not to guess what a picture represents because a parent may disappoint the child if his or her message didn't come across. Instead, ask the child to describe it. If there are people in the picture, parents could write the names next to where the child says they are, or write the word for what the picture represents.

"You want to honor their approximations," Dixon-Mokeba said.

Reach Michals at (803) 771-8532.

### PARENTS PREDICT SUCCESS

Research shows that children with older, well-educated parents are more likely to succeed academically.

- In 2003, 13 percent of mothers in Richland County had less than a high school education, which is the best ranking of all 46 counties in S.C.
- In 2003 in Richland County, 172 babies were born to mothers younger than 18. They were 3.9 percent of all babies born in the county.
- In 2003 in Richland County, 179 children, or 5.2 percent of first-graders, failed; 92 children, or 2.8 percent of second-graders, failed; 68 children, or 2 percent of third-graders, failed.

SOURCE: S.C. Kids Count 2005 Richland County report

### PARENT UNIVERSITY

Free parenting classes, including free child care and free books for anyone interested

**When:** Classes are offered two times a month: Mondays at 9 a.m. and Thursdays at 6 p.m.

**Where:** Carolina School for Inquiry at the Crane Creek Community Center, 7405-A Fairfield Road

**For information:** Victoria Dixon-Mokeba, (803) 691-1250 or vdixon-mokeba@carolinaschoolforinquiry.org. Alex Wright, (803) 691-1899 or alex@rcrc.state.sc.us.

### CAROLINA SCHOOL FOR INQUIRY

A charter school for grades K-5

**About the school:** Carolina School for Inquiry, in its first year, uses an inquiry-based curriculum and multiage classes fueled by children's innate curiosity. Charter schools are tuition-free public schools.

**For more information:** www.carolinaschoolforinquiry.org or (803) 691-1250

**Enrollment deadline:** Jan. 31 for 2007-08 school year