

# Daniel Island Academy is in the News!

## The Post and Courier



Olivia Daniel (left), school psychologist and Reference Point coordinator, plays 'Mat Man' with a small group of children in the Daniel Island Academy early childhood education program. Three-year-old Jocelyn Bryant (right) holds Mat's legs, in the shapes of the letters L and I, as part of a handwriting program. Also pictured are Jacob Daniel (left), 4, and Blake Rose, 3.

### Tracking children's progress

By Jessica Johnson  
Thursday, May 6, 2010

Mapping whether children are learning reading, writing and arithmetic formally begins in primary school, but a new program at Daniel Island Academy, an early childhood education center, charts learning in children who are just a year old.

Administrators and parents at Daniel Island Academy, a center for children ages 1-6, designed a program they are calling Reference Point in the past year. With it, teachers evaluate and chart children's whole development, gauging not only whether children are learning, but also how they learn and grow physically and socially. They use that information to develop a specialized education plan for each student. The information gathered is kept in a portfolio passed from one teacher to the next and shared with parents.

Daniel Island Academy Director Kerry Nowosielski said they started the program because some of the children spend up to nine hours a day at the center. Through the course of a week, a child might spend more waking hours at Daniel Island Academy than with their own parents. The academy offers a preschool and kindergarten program but teaches all children through play-based lessons where children learn almost by accident.

During a handwriting lesson, 3- and 4-year-old children sit in a circle around Olivia Daniel, Reference Point coordinator and school psychologist. She takes out a stack of shapes, squares, circles and lines and arranges them making a Mat Man using the lines of I's and L's for legs and arms and half-circles of O's and C's for ears and his head. Round dots of an i become eyes, noses and belly buttons. After a lot of movement and talk about shapes, Mat Man is complete.

Nowosielski said through the exercise, students become familiar with the shapes of letters, spatial awareness and working from the top down, as one does in writing. Then Daniel asks students to draw Mat Man at the table; the boys stand and the girls sit.

"What shape is your head?" Daniel coaxes. Some draw Mat Man to a T. Others are a little more creative. The exercise comes from a Handwriting Without Tears program that schools typically would use to help students develop handwriting skills. But Nowosielski said academy teachers commonly use those and other techniques.

After the students' work is done, Daniel then can analyze the drawings and speak with parents about what their child might want to work on at home. Teachers already would share some of that information with children during fall and spring conferences, but as part of the Reference Point program, they would hold a second fall conference after an initial needs assessment.

The academy tested a small group of children in a pilot program and will launch the tracking program to all grades this fall. That has parent Melanie Archer excited. "It allows the care center to meet the needs of every child," she said.