

In Memory of Adriana Loes Schuler (1947-2011)



We are profoundly saddened by the loss of our dear friend, Dr. Adriana Schuler. It is our honor and privilege to commemorate Adriana (a.k.a. Loes), who was a beloved friend, scholar, mentor, and pioneer in the field of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Her contributions in understanding autism reach back to the 1970's, and are multi-faceted and extensive. She and many colleagues, professionals and parents have applied her insights to develop better educational programs and approaches to support individuals with autism, especially in the areas of social communication, cognitive development and play. Her important contributions have always been characterized by respect for, and a deep insight into the uniqueness of individuals on the autism spectrum.

Adriana grew up in the Netherlands, and came to the United States in the 1970's to complete her Ph.D. in Neurolinguistics and Communication Disorders. At the University of California, Santa Barbara, she applied her expertise in cognitive and social development to study approaches for educating persons with ASD. During her career, Adriana served on the faculties of UC Santa Barbara and San Francisco State University, and often taught in Europe at the University of Mons (Belgium), University of Rostock (Germany) and other locations. Her work was not only well-known and respected throughout the U.S., and Europe, but also many other parts of the world where she was invited to lecture.

Adriana was one of the first to apply, in great depth, the literature on social, language and cognitive development to an understanding of assessment and intervention and autism. In 1980, she co-authored the seminal book, *Emerging Language in Autistic Children* (with Warren Fay), the first comprehensive work to apply research in child development to understanding the unique patterns of language and social communication in ASD. In her early publications, she raised important questions about echolalia, which greatly influenced subsequent research from a developmental person-centered perspective, rather than viewing echolalia solely as "deviant language". She contributed many chapters to the Handbooks of Autism and PDD, and was a co-author of the first National Dissemination Project on Autism funded by the US Department of Education. In subsequent years, Adriana collaborated on efforts to address core challenges of children with autism through supported play with typical peers. As co-director of a federally funded innovations project, she had a key role in the research and development of the Integrated Play Groups model. Adriana published many articles and chapters focused on related topics while expanding on her formative body of work. In recent years, Adriana spearheaded a longitudinal investigation focused on understanding factors that contributed to successful outcomes for individuals with autism and their families. A book is now in the final stages of preparation for publication by her co-authors in her name.

Adriana traveled nationally and internationally to provide training to educators and therapists, ushering in a new era of respectful and developmentally-based approaches to complement and transform traditional behavioral approaches which dominated the field early on. Her research into "developmental discontinuity" or understanding the peaks and valleys of people with autism, and work on peer play and with families characterized her devotion to looking at and supporting people with autism in respectful ways.

In addition to having a great and rare intellect, Adriana was a true "Renaissance woman" who conversed and published in several languages. She greatly enjoyed music and was an accomplished keyboard player, who built her own harpsichord. Adriana was a loving mother, who raised two amazing daughters. Anyone who knew her well can share stories of "adventures with Adriana", as she always invited her family, friends and colleagues to join in her enthusiasm for living life to its fullest.

Adriana touched many lives, and will continue to be an inspiration for future generations of students, professionals and the autism community. Her passion for teaching and learning, her friendship and her indomitable "joie de vivre" will always be with us.

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