

## Chapter 2

IATSS Seminar  
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### *Panel Discussion*

#### Moderator

#### **Fumihiko Nakamura**

Professor, Dean, Institute of Urban Innovation, Yokohama National University

#### Panelists

#### **Hildegard Roosen**

Former Headmaster of Vechteltschule

#### **Toru Ando**

Vice Principal, Kanagawa Prefectural Seya Special Needs School

#### **Keita Suzuki**

President and CEO, Kaiken Co., Ltd.



## Towards Support for Commuting by Students with Disabilities

### Looking at the Person, Not the Disability

**Nakamura:** This research focused on the public transport necessary for persons with intellectual disabilities to participate in the community. We considered this an opportunity to implement training on the use of public transport for the commute to special needs schools by students with intellectual disabilities and implemented various research activities and actual experiments. In this panel discussion, based on the lecture provided by Ms. Roosen, I would like to engage in further discussions, together with Mr. Suzuki, whose company provides employment support for persons with developmental disabilities and Mr. Ando, the Vice Principal of Seya Special Needs School. Could I ask Mr. Suzuki and Mr. Ando to first give a brief self-introduction?

**Suzuki:** I previously worked as an announcer at NHK, but I found this work uninspiring, so I went to graduate school in the United States, where I received an MBA. It was at this time that my three-year-old daughter was diagnosed with developmental disorder accompanying an intellectual disability. I asked myself whether there was something that I could do to help and during this



Fumihiko Nakamura



Keita Suzuki

time I discovered the Danish company called Specialisterne, which employs people with developmental disorders as software engineers. The encounter with Specialisterne inspired me to establish Kaien Co., Ltd. We are mainly involved in work to support the employment of persons with developmental disabilities. We have two training facilities in Akihabara, one in Shinjuku, and one in Yokohama. On weekdays approximately 80 persons are participating in training.

**Ando:** I am Vice Principal of Kanagawa Prefectural Seya Special Needs School. As a part of this research project, in January 2013 we used our school bus to engage in actual field tests. It was an extremely beneficial opportunity and one that I am very grateful for. Seya Special Needs School was the first of the more than 20 special needs school to be established in Kanagawa. We currently have approximately 300 children on our roll, from first grade elementary school students to third grade high school students.

The type of inclusive education that Ms. Roosen spoke about is exactly the kind of education that we are aiming for in Kanagawa, and indeed around the country, and we are engaged in efforts based on traffic safety education. Support for commuting is of great significance for students as it broadens the scope of their everyday lives. However, with regard to the systemization of such education in a school-based environment, I think that there are many areas that require further attention, in terms of the time devoted to such education and whether it has become truly systemized.

**Nakamura:** Thank you. I would now like to briefly introduce the MogLi Project that is being implemented by Ms. Roosen. The project was started in 2007 in the German city of Nordhorn, which is located close to the border with the Netherlands. It is a project that provides training to students with disabilities on using city buses to commute to school, and is implemented with the



Hildegard Roosen



Toru Ando

cooperation of local bus companies. The school that is the subject of the project, Vechtetalschule, has created a three-stage program for traffic safety education and aims to enable students with disabilities to gain the skills necessary to commute independently to school. The project is an advanced one in that the buses that are used for commuting are not those owned by the school, but are those run by the city bus association.

**Roosen:** Thank you for the introduction. I would add that the school buses are run by the city and are the responsibility of the city authorities. However, given the extreme difficulty of planning and implementing such a system, the staff at the school worked together with the bus authorities to coordinate the system. Looking at the situation across the whole of Germany, until now it has been mainly the case that schools have operated their own school buses. I imagine that this is also the case in Japan. My concept was to move away from such a system. Are the school buses in Japan generally operated by the schools?

**Ando:** In the case of Japan, although in my case I am speaking purely about Kanagawa Prefecture, basically it is the schools that operate bus services themselves. As we are a prefectural school, it is the prefectural Board of Education that selects the bus company and pays for the service. However, it is generally the schools themselves that engage in direct contact with the bus drivers and bus companies concerning bus routes and other matters.

**Nakamura:** This may be a very Japanese-oriented question to ask, but are there any agreements in place between the school and the bus operator concerning the scope of responsibility for the commute to school?

**Roosen:** I think that such decisions regarding responsibility will depend from

case to case and also on the way of looking at each case. It would depend on what type of accident occurred. Naturally the school takes on a certain degree of responsibility, but we are unable to comprehensively provide guarantees for all aspects of travel. However, this situation is not limited solely to special needs schools, as there are often reports of accidents on regular school buses in the daily news.

What is important for us is that we gain the support of the parents, including with regard to such risks. In other words, it is necessary for the parents to want their children to gain the skills to be able to commute independently and in so doing give their support to our efforts. If students are able to acquire independence on the commute to school they gain the confidence to do other things independently, like, for example, going to buy something at the supermarket. This helps to broaden the horizons of the students. Thankfully to date no accidents have occurred at our school, although there was one case where a student got to know a girl on the bus and didn't actually arrive at school (*laughs*). I don't know whether this could be referred to as an "accident," but this is the level of things we have had to deal with so far, which was something we could laugh about.

**Nakamura:** Yes, rather than being an accident, that is an example of pleasant exchange and interaction on the bus, isn't it? As part of the MogLi Project, mobility coaches accompany students on the buses to give guidance about the commuting route. Are these mobility coaches actually teachers from your school? Or are they from the bus operator or persons with special qualifications?

**Roosen:** When the project started there were approximately 100 students who were participating. As it would have been difficult for school teachers alone to provide tuition and training to such a large number, using the budget for the MogLi Project we advertised in the local newspapers for trainers. A variety of people applied for the positions, including retired teachers and nurses. We conducted a stringent screening process and finally employed a total of 15 "mobility coaches" from among the applicants. We also gave training to these 15 coaches in order that they could fully understand the purposes of the MogLi Project and the needs of the students.

We currently employ directly at our school a person who possesses qualifications



in social education. It is this person who provides mobility support to students on their way to and from school. During school hours she/he also provides various mobility-related training to students and also takes charge of a number of classes. Initially it was necessary to have 15 mobility coaches, but now we have found that one full-time position is sufficient.

**Nakamura:** In order to achieve commuting using city buses I imagine that in addition to providing training to students, it is also important to educate bus drivers. What kind of education and training are you providing to such people?

**Roosen:** In Germany bus drivers are required by law to participate in training four times a year. We implement training relating to commuting for students with disabilities within the framework of this regular training. We created the training program for bus drivers in collaboration with Giessen University (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen). Approximately 150 bus drivers took the four-hour training course. Given the fact that 150 drivers were taking the course the training was implemented over the course of several weeks. Although four hours may be a relatively short period of time, we believe that it has produced many positive results.

**Nakamura:** As the students are riding regular city buses they will be sharing the bus with regular passengers. Have you engaged in any public relations to make citizens aware of your efforts?

**Roosen:** That is a difficult question. Naturally we cannot provide training to all citizens and residents about how to respond to persons with disabilities. However, I believe that it is possible to eliminate any unease or concerns through actual contact with persons with disabilities. It is important to create opportunities where people can get to know and understand each other better.

In other words, it is important for people to see not the disability, but the person. That is what I have learned from my various experiences.

There are times when problems arise. Let me give you an example. There was a time when an autistic child on the bus was jerking his body in various positions, which caused concern to other passengers. Apparently the bus driver said to the other passengers, "This child is autistic. Although he may jerk his body around like that it is important for you to be kind to him" There was another example when a bus driver on a commuting route returned from his summer holidays and was actually hit by an autistic student. During his holidays the bus driver had become very sun tanned and he had also had his hair cut shorter than previously. The student therefore thought that he was a different man, felt uneasy, and then went on to strike out at the driver. After this incident the bus driver has become to understand that this is one of the characteristics of autism, so the next time when he took holidays he told the student in advance, " I am going on holiday, and when I come back, I might be a little sun tanned and look different, but there is no need to worry." What is of primary importance is for people to have a chance to get to know and understand each other. Naturally we could have sent out detailed information in advance to all citizens about the characteristics of autism, but I do not believe doing that alone would be enough. I think, even with such information, there would be some people who become worried and anxious, or even a little annoyed.

Another example is children with Down's syndrome, whose behavior has various specific characteristics. They may suddenly touch or embrace another person. We would like the bus drivers and other citizens to learn about how to respond to such situations from actual experiences. What is important is to respond calmly and not to be afraid, but rather to say quietly to the child that you don't want to be embraced or kissed. Different disabilities present different characteristics, but it is important to look not at the disability itself but rather the child, and respond in an accepting and accommodating manner. That is what is meant by "learning by doing."

**Suzuki:** I believe that for a child with autism, although it may be possible to remember one route, it is difficult to get them to respond to a second or third route. How do you apply your project in such situations? A child may be able to remember the route between home and school, but be unable to go beyond this route. I wonder whether this type of training could be applied well to children with autism.



**Roosen:** Autism presents itself in various different ways. For example, in the case of autism where the child concentrates on minute details and has extremely good memory skills, he or she may be able to memorize the entire bus timetable. However, for different types of autism it may be difficult to broaden the scope of the route. The response differs depending on the type of autism. There will be cases in which the route is limited to that between home and school, but other cases where it is possible to broaden the routes used. What we try to do is to apply the training in accordance with the characteristics of each child. Children with the capability to understand are provided with small maps and bus route charts.

**Nakamura:** After graduation students will go on to find employment, so is it possible for the students to apply what they have learned in the MogLi Project to other situations, for example the route to their place of work? Or is there a project plan in place that responds to the needs of adults in a similar manner?

**Roosen:** This is an extremely important topic. It is also one of the objectives of our project. In Germany there are workshops and studios available for persons with disabilities, but many of our students really want to work in a regular environment. If they work in a regular environment there are no special buses available and therefore they must be able to commute independently to their place of work. If they are able to commute by themselves they may be able to find a regular job. Our project is therefore also very important for our students as it will enable them to use public transport, including buses and other modes of transport, to travel to their place of work.

In the MogLi Project we conduct commuting training using real buses and the real transport environment. By applying the skills they have learned many of

the students become able to travel to various places independently. Of course there are cases where it is necessary for the students to have support and be accompanied by assistants, but acquiring mobility skills helps to broaden their choices with regard to the type and place of work.

In actual fact, we are currently seeking to launch the MogLi2 Project, based on the results of the original MogLi Project. This project will target not only students with intellectual disabilities but also adults with disabilities. Ultimately we want to further broaden the scope to also include the elderly, and develop a transport education program that will improve mobility for them too. This is something that Giessen University is very interested in and it is applying to various transport-related organizations in Germany to implement the project.

### Creating cooperative networks

**Ando:** How does cooperation and collaboration among the police, hospitals, government administration and schools work under the MogLi Project?

**Roosen:** Cooperative relations were truly vital to the success of the project. What we had to do was to ensure that everyone concerned was on board the same “MogLi boat.” We had to become a group sharing a common objective and destiny. It was particularly important to create a network among the persons concerned. To achieve this it was of great importance to persuade people through face-to-face interactions and impress upon such people that their support was essential to the success of the project.

This project could not have been realized by the school working alone. For the MogLi commuting training we received the cooperation of the bus company and the local police service. It was vital to the success of the project that we were not working alone, but rather than that we made efforts to create a social network. Although a person on their own may be powerless, if all such people join together in a network it becomes possible to achieve change. Efforts do not simply end when the network has been formed; it is important to continue to develop the network through regular exchange of information and other actions. It is thanks to such cooperative relations that if anything happens we can immediately telephone the bus company, transport authority or local government officials.





**Ando:** I believe that schools in Japan also understand very well the importance of networks with the police and local government administration. Once or twice a year members of the local police force visit our school to conduct traffic safety education, providing training on how to understand traffic signals and how to cross the road at crossings. In terms of commuting training our school staff members also regularly accompany students to the bus stop and teach them about how to queue and manners when on board the bus.

What I was really impressed to hear was that under the MogLi Project traffic safety education is actually positioned as part of the classroom curriculum. What is important for schools is not to implement training as a one-off exercise, but to incorporate traffic safety education into the standard curriculum and to support students in becoming able to commute independently through a staged approach. I would like to ask Ms. Roosen to speak in a little more detail about how the traffic safety education has been incorporated into the school curriculum.

**Roosen:** In Germany too, transport education is not an official subject in schools and it has been largely ignored in the curriculum to date. However, it is compulsory to conduct transport education and so it has been the case that teachers implemented the minimum level of education in order to fulfil this legal requirement, conducting transport education about once a month. Over the last five to six years there have been significant changes and transport education has gained a more prominent position. The launch of the MogLi Project had a significant impact in this regard and it is being developed to apply to not just special needs schools but all kinds of schools. In addition, as we are aiming to provide education that relates to behavioral skills in general, including knowledge about traffic safety, as well as awareness of the transport environment and health issues, we were able to develop it in a way that made it possible to incorporate it as an official subject in school. Furthermore, as the implementation of the MogLi

Project has encouraged regular exchange with the various organizations and groups I have mentioned and invigorated networks, we are being supported in our efforts to achieve the inclusions of traffic safety education in the curriculum.

### From traffic safety to transport education

**Nakamura:** As Mr. Ando has just noted, in Japan we use the term “education on traffic safety,” but you just used the term “transport education.”

**Roosen:** In the past the concept was focused on “traffic safety.” Now we use the term “transport education” in order to convey the meaning that the education includes measures to gain social skills through transport-related learning. For example, we seek to promote education that asks such questions as why it is necessary to obey traffic rules, and, from a health perspective, why it is better for the environment to travel by bicycle rather than automobile, or what method of transport is the best for the environment. We do not stop merely at teaching traffic safety rules, but aim to provide education on transport in a more comprehensive sense. In a situation in which a fight or altercation occurs on the bus on the way to school, the social skills that are needed to know how to behave in such a situation go beyond the framework of traffic safety. The students learn about such skills and situations by experiencing the actual transport environment.

**Suzuki:** You have mentioned that the students each have a mobile phone so that there are prepared for any unexpected situation, such as the bus being late or failing to arrive. What kind of software have you developed? Could you tell us about how it is used?

**Roosen:** We commissioned a specialist software company to develop the software. Although I understand the functions of the software that we use, I am afraid that I do not know the specifics about how it was developed.

The functions of the software are extremely simple. Only a limited number of keys, from 1 to 5, are used and by pressing “1” the student can call his/her parents, or press “2” to speak with a travel route assistant. If the bus has been delayed the software provides information to the student automatically, via voice mail or text message. It is a well thought-out system, but in actual fact the students hardly



use the software. We realized that there were very few situations in which it was necessary for them to use it, which demonstrates the high level of mobility skills the children already had. Naturally it is important that we developed the software and provided it to the students to be prepared for any unexpected situation. However, what is more important is to draw out and develop the skills of the person who is using the software. Rather than depending on technology for everything it is important to believe in people's skills and work to develop them further.

**Suzuki:** Recently those who involved in the welfare sector in Japan have come to have very high expectations of application software and I also tended to have similar expectations, too. However, listening to what Ms. Roosen has just said has reconfirmed for me the importance of believing in people's skills too.

**Nakamura:** We are running out of time. Can I ask you all to make final comments?

**Ando:** For me, what was most important in today's discussions was the realization that there are various things that can be implemented simply in schools. Rather than allotting special time for classes in schools, other things could be easily done are, for example, to draw a line down the middle of the school corridor and make a rule that students should walk on the right. This kind of activity incorporates some aspects of transport education and this is one of the hints I have gained from today's discussion.

We are seeking to implement transport education at our school with the cooperation of the police, medical institutions, local government and bus operators. If all these people and organizations could work together as a team I feel that even more progress could be made with regard to transport education.

**Suzuki:** I would like to make two points.

Firstly, welfare in Japan is often said to be focused purely on isolated points, with no kind of systemized support to link these pin-pointed efforts together. Although such efforts have made progress I still feel the necessity for more progress on creating linked-up networks.

The second point that I would like to make is that prior to joining this panel discussion I thought that discussion would focus mainly on infrastructure (hard) aspects of transport systems. However, today most of the discussion has been about the non-infrastructure (soft) side of efforts, including how to provide information, the education curriculum and mechanisms for cooperation. I heard from Ms. Roosen that she was bewildered by the sheer volume of information in Tokyo, which made me feel the real importance of considering not merely the transmission of information, but the ways in which it is transmitted and other non-infrastructure aspects.

**Roosen:** It has been my pleasure today to provide a report about the MogLi Project. However, I do not believe that what we are trying to achieve through the MogLi Project is so groundbreaking. From what I have heard in today's discussions I believe that in Japan too various efforts are underway within Japanese transport systems and also in schools. Although the promotion of a project naturally entails costs and it may be said that budgetary allocation is required, it is not the case that nothing can be done without funding. I believe that the situation is similar in Japan and Germany. What is important is to engage in the actions that it is possible for us to engage in. There are still many problems and challenges remaining in Germany. It is therefore important for us to learn from each other and the various projects we are implementing in our countries, so I would very much like to visit Japan again in the future. I hope that exchange between our countries will continue. I am very grateful for the opportunity to visit Japan on this occasion. Thank you very much.

**Nakamura:** When launching this research project we started by studying what kind of research is being conducted in Japan concerning transport mobility for persons with intellectual disabilities. However, what we found was that there are regrettably very few examples of such research in Japan. We sought advice from a professor at Darmstadt University of Technology (Technische Universität

Darmstadt) , who engaged in a study of all efforts being implemented in Germany, which led us to the MogLi Project. I believe that in this sector MogLi is one of the world's most outstanding projects. If there is an opportunity to do so, I believe it to be of the greatest importance for people from Japan to visit Nordhorn and observe the situation there, both in the town and at the school. At today's seminar we have participants involved in the welfare sector in Japan and also those from urban planning-related associations. There are various examples of trials and research into transport mobility for persons with disabilities and I hope to have an opportunity to share such examples with you in the future. I would now like to conclude the panel discussion. Thank you all very much.