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From Open University to University Degree Student - A narrative study of Finnish Open University Students who have gained admission to University through Open University.

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Finnish Open University education is open to everyone, regardless of educational background or age. Open Universities cannot award degrees, but the credits obtained in them are transferable and can be used as part of a degree should one later enroll in a university.

This narrative study focuses on the stories told by students of the University of Lapland. These students have studied in the Open University and then gained admission to university degree students on the basis of their studies in Open University. The research material includes narrative interviews of seventeen students. In the analysis of the data both is used: the analysis of narratives and the narrative analysis.

In Finland the specific route for the adults from the Open University to university's degree students is still rather narrow. These students taking this "Open University track" have already studied a major part of their degree studies when enrolling to university. The admission requires successfully completed studies at the Open University. These students have often studied Open University courses in institutes which organize Open University studies in co-operation with universities not necessarily at university campus.

The results of this study showed that the interviewees felt that their studying had a comprehensive importance in their lives. Studying had professional and personal as well as socializing and equalizing importance. Interviewees felt also that the transition from Open University to degree student was uncomplicated. Instead they felt that socializing to academic community and finding out its practices was more challenging. These students compare their narratives with cultural master narratives about the ideal students: one is the self-directed adult student and the other is the younger university degree student.

As a result of a narrative analysis three typical narratives was constructed: a story of a young degree achieving student, a hectic story of a student who studies in parallel with his family and work, and the third narrative which was about an elder student who is making his young age dream come true. As a result it seemed that the students go through various paths to the university.

There are various kinds of students in modern universities. It is important to listen to many different stories, because stories told by marginal actors may serve an emancipatory function for future students. New kind of students with various backgrounds challenges academe to develop its practices.

Based on the findings, one of the challenges of Finnish university education is to develop ways of guidance for students who have already studied a major part of their degree in Open University. Also open universities should develop the guidance process for those students who are degree-orientated at the very beginning of their study path.