Young people make up a sizeable part of the people currently seeking refuge in Denmark. This thesis is set to analyse how courses at a Danish folk high school (højskole) are understood and practiced as a path towards the inclusion of young refugees in everyday life in Denmark. Drawing on constructivist and hermeneutical philosophies of science, I explore everyday interactions and school life through participant observation, qualitative interviews and focus group data generated during two weeks of fieldwork at a folk high school working with refugee integration. The theoretical framework consists of the sociology of everyday life of Berger and Luckmann, Goffman’s theory of everyday interactions, Bourdieu’s concepts of capital and habitus as well as concepts of immigrant integration. In the analysis, I present the perspectives of refugee students, Danish students as well as the principal and vice principal of the school.

The analysis shows how the folk high school is understood as an institution providing refugees with knowledge about Danish society, potentially enabling them to take part in everyday life and pursue their life strategies. A stable institution with strong community-oriented values, the school supports the wellbeing of students with violent experiences of war and flight and facilitates relations of mutual trust between refugee students and majority ethnic Danish students. The school constitutes a springboard for ‘negotiated integration’, encouraging cultural diversity while at the same time demanding refugees conform to ‘Danish norms’ of equality. Furthermore, attending a folk high school is viewed as an investment in the refugees’ future inclusion in everyday life through the acquisition of Danish language proficiency, situational knowledge of appropriate conduct and a social network. Activities with a clear common purpose enable students to interact as equals, regardless of Danish language proficiency and knowledge of behavioural norms. At other times, language barriers impede interactions between Danish and refugee students, leading to misunderstandings and unresolved conflicts. Furthermore, ethnic majority Danish students and refugee students have different expectations toward the nature of their stay at the school, causing an ambivalent division of roles and highlighting the Danish students’ privileges. However, the school generally constitutes a safe haven for refugees to learn about Danish society and for the students to negotiate their understandings of each other and build social relationships.

Finally, I argue that this study contains insights that can be applied to broader contexts than the folk high school itself. With the analysis as my starting point, I discuss the complexity of the conditions necessary for building inclusive communities between refugees and Danes in various areas of everyday life.