Hope Is in Our Hands

Emily Dickinson’s poem, “'Hope' is the thing with feathers", imagines hope as a bird whose song persists even through the fiercest storms. At Yorkville University’s British Columbia campus in New Westminster, near the mighty Fraser River, her words inspired a collaborative exploration of hope in higher education in Canada.

Our campus is a meeting place of worlds. International students, faculty, and staff bring different languages, cultures, experiences, challenges, and dreams. Community members were invited to express what hope in higher education means to them on colourful paper hands. The many colours reflect our university community's rich diversity, while each handwritten message represents a unique voice, identity, and aspiration. Student ambassadors assembled these hands to spell HOPE, surrounded by feathers. One student also created a bird from feathers, bringing Dickinson’s metaphor to life.

In a time of pending ecological crisis, increased institutional pressures, and social and political uncertainty, hope cannot simply mean expecting better days. Dickinson’s bird continues singing despite the storm, reminding us that hope acknowledges adversity while refusing to surrender to it. Resilience, however, need not be a solitary endeavour.

Like the mighty Fraser River, strengthened by many tributaries, the Yorkville community draws strength from diverse journeys coming together. Against an imagined Yorkville-blue sky, the feathered bird symbolizes our collective courage to spread our wings and soar beyond familiar horizons.

For us, a pedagogy of hope begins with listening, belonging, and ensuring every voice matters. Education is not merely about preparing individuals for uncertain futures, but empowering communities to shape those futures together.

Hope has feathers. Hope has many colours. Hope has many voices. And, ultimately, hope is in our hands.