

Cavite school allows poorest students to ‘level up’

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MANILA, Philippines—Poverty had stripped them not only of their basic needs but also of their hopes for a brighter future and their belief that they could be better individuals.

The biggest challenge for the Sisters of Mary Schools (SMS) is how to encourage their impoverished students “to believe in themselves,” principal Sr. Gertrudes Dayag said during the 3rd Excellence in Educational Transformation Awards (EETA) held on Thursday at the Edsa Shangri-La Hotel in Mandaluyong City.

“Our students come from the poorest communities in the country. There was no hope for them,” Dayag said. “But because of our collaboration with our benefactors, we were able to restore their hope and let them believe again that they can be better and productive members of society.”

The SMS in Silang, Cavite, which provides free education to underprivileged youth, was among the five schools honored on Thursday by Bayan Academy, the Knowledge Channel Foundation and Rex Book Store for the innovations they had introduced and developed to improve their students’ learning.

The sisters, in partnership with local parishes, are focused on finding underprivileged youth in places such as the Mountain Province and Aurora, who would be given access to education.

To be admitted, a student must have completed his or her elementary education, belong to a family that earns less than P5,000 a month, and pass the interview and screening.

At the live-in high school, Dayag said their “unique curriculum” of three years of “highly compressed schooling” and a year dedicated to “intensive training in a technical-vocational course of the student’s liking,” allowed their students to get a new lease on life.

93 percent employed

“Last year, 93 percent of our 690 graduates were able to land a job,” Dayag said.

Among the technical-vocational courses offered at SMS are dressmaking, consumer electronics servicing and computer hardware servicing.

“What SMS clearly models is the highly beneficial impact of creating an enabling environment suited to the situation of the most needy but surely deserving students so that they can ‘catch up’ on their education and, eventually, compete at the level of the best graduates of more privileged schools,” Bayan Academy

chair Dr. Eduardo Morato Jr. said in his book on the five EETA awardees, which was launched on Thursday.

Rex Book Store chief operating officer Don Timothy Buhain said stories such as that of SMS was what inspired them to put up the annual awards program, which “recognizes the innovative efforts of schools in transforming themselves into institutions that promote learning effectiveness and school efficiency while being true to their vision, mission and values.”

“Schools usually share stories of despair—decreasing enrollment rates and the like. We want to show that there are many schools out there with stories of success and hope,” Buhain said.

For this year, the EETA received close to 100 entries. SMS, along with Pasig Elementary School, Top Achievers Private School in Alicia, Isabela, and St. Paul College Pasig, received P300,000 in cash prize.

Sharing with community

Dayag said the prize will be used to improve the school’s science laboratory and library to benefit its more than 3,400

students.

Taking home this year’s top honor is Xavier School. School president Fr. Aristotle Dy said that being a part of this year’s roster of winners was a good opportunity for them to “share the innovations with a wider community.”

Dy was particularly proud of their “technology in education program,” where students bring their iPads and laptops to class as part of stepping up technology.

“The teachers help students look for information themselves and process them. A project follows so that the education is contextualized and they are active learners,” Dy said.

He said that apart from the different programs and innovations, what probably made Xavier School stand out in this year’s EETA was how it had taken seriously its six C’s mantra—conscience, compassion, character, community, competence and culture—and “bringing it down to the lesson plans and aligning activities to it.”

Dy said the challenge for the school now was sustaining and strengthening the innovations that had been set in place.

“[You may say that] starting something is easy, but keeping its quality is difficult,” he said. “I think we have done enough innovations, it’s now a matter of leveling up the quality.”

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