



Dr. Josette Biyo isn't just a star teacher, she's a planet, too. Read on to find out why.

PROUD TO BE A Filipino Teacher

BY MARICRIS SIMPAS

Somewhere between Mars and Jupiter spins a small planet—about four to nine kilometers in diameter—named Planet Biyo. This heavenly body, originally known only as Planet 13241, was named by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the US after Dr. Josette Biyo, a Filipino teacher from Philippine Science High School in Iloilo.

For her innovative teaching methods in science research, Dr. Biyo bested 4,000 teachers from around the world to win the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) Award for Excellence in Teaching last May 2002 in Louisville, Kentucky. She is the first Asian to receive this award, which was created in 1997 to honor teachers who promote inquiry and inspire students to engage in real research.

In teaching teens the scientific research process, Dr. Biyo often takes her class on “scientific adventures”: field trips to research institutes around the Visayas where her students interact with practicing scientists and even assist her in her own research work. As a result, her students over the years have produced an impressive body of research, covering topics like physics, robotics, oceanography and marine life.

A REAL PERSON

Dr. Biyo, a veteran educator with a doctorate in biology, is now a celeb-

THIS PAGE PHOTO: JO AVILA MAKEUP: BARBIE CHAN

Simple Advice from an Award-Winning Teacher

- Put your students first and see them as individuals
- Give your best and be happy in what you do
- Never stop learning
- FOCUS: Channel your energies on issues that most need your attention, and those you can actually do something about

city in the education world, hopping on planes during weekends to give talks both here and abroad, fielding phone calls from various media groups who want interviews, and meeting with large institutions that want to work with her in various ways. And yet she remains warm and accommodating, insisting that she is still a teacher first.

Dr. Biyo actually comes from a family of teachers, with four siblings and a father who are all educators themselves. At first, she wanted to become a medical doctor, but seeing that there were too many students taking up the same course, she decided to look for the fastest way to earn money with Biology, which meant teaching it.

THE EDUCATOR'S NEED TO LEARN

After her first year in education, Dr. Biyo knew that she was meant to teach because, she says, she discovered her talent for making complicated things easy to understand. Besides biology, she also taught other subjects like English and Music at her alma mater, a rural school in Januiay, Iloilo.

But eight years later, she felt didn't have anything more to offer her students. She applied for and was awarded a scholarship to pursue her Masters degree in De La Salle University. Her thirst for learning allowed her to finish her degree in less than two years, after which she was offered a full-time position as assistant professor.

"I believe that teaching is a never-ending process of learning. Even if you have a PhD, it's just a name. There are still many things you still don't know," she says. "We must always read on the subject even if you have taught the same subject for 24 years. Even if the content is the same, every year the students change, so it is different."

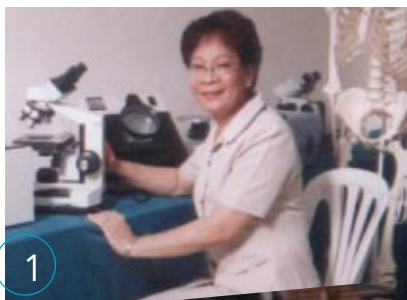
THE CHALLENGE OF CHALLENGING STUDENTS

When her students are asked whether or not Dr. Biyo is strict, they would answer with a smile, "When it comes to requirements." She admits that she expects much from her them.

However, she finds it challenging to capture the attention of today's stu-

dents. "With the TV, computer, and texting, the method of teaching should be effective and personalized. Students have limited attention span in the classroom, but can stay in front of the computer for 24 hours. Our lessons should be interactive and student-centered." She also feels that to keep up with technology and the effects of globalization, "we should teach children to be multi-skilled. They should also have entrepreneurial skills. The world today is very competitive."

She considers doing field work as a memorable experience for both her and her students. "Not all students excel in the classroom setting. When they are given the chance to go out, one can see the individual talents."



Dr. Biyo at work in Philippine Science High School in Iloilo. She shares: "I am happy in teaching. I benefit the most from this because I am happy. This is what keeps me going."

THE TEACHER'S TEACHER

Dr. Biyo is also a recipient of the Metrobank Foundation's Outstanding Young Filipino Award in Secondary Education. She confesses that she now pressures herself to accept as many speaking engagements as possible so she can reach out to more teachers. Through this, she has discovered her potential to lead. Now, she doesn't only consider herself a student's teacher, but a teacher's teacher as well. Dr. Biyo now gives numerous talks and workshops on her methods of teaching, both here and abroad.

Despite the honors, she remains simple: "Everyday is my joy if I give my best to my students. I teach them not because it is expected of me, but because it's just my nature that in whatever I do, I give the best I can give, whether I get paid or not."

A FAMILY AFFAIR

When she doesn't have any commitments, Dr. Biyo relaxes with her family. A typical afternoon is spent in the living room with each family member beside a pile of books. Her own personal favorites are *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, self-help books, *The Little Prince*, and books by James Maxwell, a scientist and writer from the 1800s.

Her two sons are also her speech critics. "When I read my talk and I see that they react, and they are interested, then I know that it will have an impact on the audience. It's actually a family affair." Both sons have expressed their desire to teach in the future as well.

IMPROVING THE SYSTEM

On a larger scale, Dr. Biyo wishes to improve the educational system of the country. She thinks that teachers shouldn't just depend on the Department of Education, but take the initiative to contribute to positive change on their own. "I just do it my way. By being in a small milieu like the Philippine Science High School, by giving my best to the students, by implementing innovation, by organizing and elevating the status of the teachers, and also by extending my expertise to other schools and teachers in the province. Through this I think I can initiate change in the educational system." ★

WEBSITE RESOURCES

For more information about the Intel ISEF Excellence in Teaching Award, visit: www.intel.com/education/isef/awards.htm

See a listing of names of minor planets: <http://cfa-www.harvard.edu/iau/lists/MPNames.html>

ABOUT THE WRITER:

Maricris Simpás is currently a teacher at Assumption Iloilo and is also taking her Masters in Business at UP Iloilo.