

DR. JOSETTE T. BIYO

Special Science Teacher V
Philippine Science High School
Western Visayas Campus, Iloilo City
Presidential Lingkod Bayan Awardee, 2007
Individual Category

Albert Einstein had his Theory of Relativity, Marie Curie her Nobel Prize for the discovery of radioactivity, and Isaac Newton his famous falling apple. But in the charming, rustic town of Jaro, Iloilo, a science teacher has a planet to her name.

“Nature is the best laboratory,” says Dr. Josette Talamera Biyo, a multi-awarded teacher and now Director of the state-run Philippine Science High School (PSHS) Western Visayas campus. For a Research and Biology teacher, Dr. Biyo is not one to be cooped inside the classroom.

“I always bring my students to the field,” she relates. “They have studied the population structure of trees, flowering plants and birds in certain mountains of Panay Island. They have researched on the potential medicinal properties of corals, sponges, mangroves, seagrass and other organisms in the wild.”

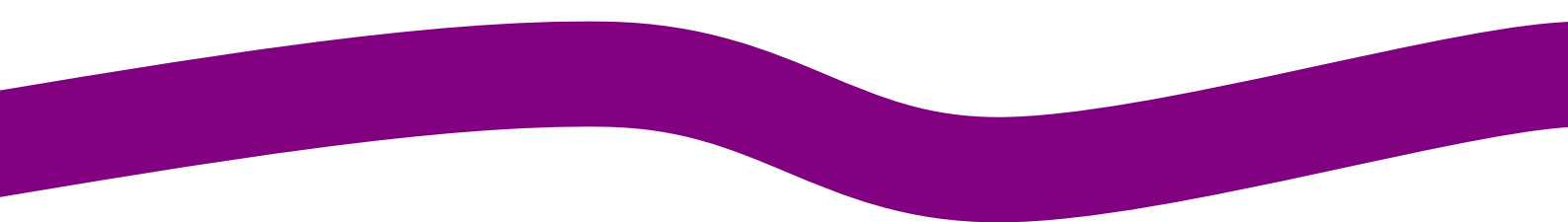
She says that through this process-oriented approach, the students are trained to be independent learners and enjoy applying the concepts and skills they have learned in the classroom.

Dr. Biyo’s innovative and novel methods of teaching have earned her accolades from various institutions here and abroad. She was hailed as one of the outstanding teachers of the country by the Metrobank Foundation in 1997, one of The Outstanding Young Filipinos (now known as The Outstanding Young Men or TOYM) by the Philippine Jaycees in 1998, a Presidential *Lingkod Bayan* awardee by the Civil Service Commission in 2007, and one of the 50 Great Men and Women of Science by the Department of Science and Technology in 2008.

But her most popular feat yet is conquering the Intel Excellence in Teaching Competition held in Louisville, Kentucky in 2002. She was the first Asian teacher to bag such award – and from a Third World country at that – besting 4,000 other science and math teachers from different parts of the globe. As part of the recognition, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Lincoln Laboratory gave the name “Planet Biyo” to a minor planet found in the asteroid belt, somewhere between Mars and Jupiter.

Growing up in a family of educators, it was easy for Dr. Biyo to develop a fondness for learning. “I started to excel in academics in high school. But I enjoyed being the leader in school activities more than getting honors,” she recalls.





Hoping to pursue a medical career, Dr. Biyo finished a B.S. Biological Science degree from the University of the Philippines in Visayas but due to lack of resources, she turned her back on med school and took a teaching post instead.

It wasn't long before she found her home in the classroom. "Teaching has a lot of challenges - lack of equipment, lack of materials and infrastructure support, working longer hours than what is credited for pay," she says. "But for me, these challenges are just part of the job. They have never overwhelmed me."

Dr. Biyo wants her students to have fun with Science Research, the same way she enjoys teaching it to them. "*Mahirap kasi ituro ang Research. Sa katunayan, parang napakahina pa ng ating research culture dito sa bansa. Kaya kadalasan, 'pag may Ph.D. o graduate degree ka, hindi ka magtuturo sa high school. Magtuturo ka sa college o sa graduate students rin,*" she explains.

Aside from doing field work, the students are deployed as interns to different research and educational institutions during summer vacation.

Dr. Biyo is much admired not only by her colleagues in the academe and scientific community, but more importantly, by the students who have realized through her the thrill and joy of learning. Once, her students wrote her a letter that said, "Dear Ma'am Josette, we know you are being groomed for directorship of the school and you would want to be the director someday, given the chance. The thing is, we don't want you to be the director. We just want you to be a teacher. *Pisay* needs teachers like you. The Philippines needs teachers like you."

Taking off from her students' words, Dr. Biyo stresses the important role of teachers. "We are molding the minds and most especially the hearts of our students. *Mahalin natin ang ating trabaho kasi kahit hindi naman malaki ang ating sahod, napakalaki ng impact ng mga ginagawa natin sa isip ng mga bata.* They are the future leaders of this country, so let's do our best and give the best [quality of] education to our students." •

