# 44 - REELABORATIONS AND PARTICULARIZATIONS: NOTES ON DOM BOSCO'S EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES GROUNDED ON VITORINO DA FELTRE AND FELIPE NERY.

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**Introduction**

In other works (Borges, 2000a, Borges, 2000b, 2005), I made some references to the Italian priest and educator John Bosco (1815-1888), also known as Don Bosco, comparing him to a *bricoleur*, according to the idea developed by Levi-Strauss, as Don Bosco seems to have built his pastoral-pedagogic experience from several elements from different origins which, once articulated, comprise an organized whole, different for the XIX century, but not exactly new inside the educational places and promotional entities for assistance. In fact, when we limit Don Bosco's biographies inside and outside the Salesian tradition, it is possible to verify that his commitment to studies on Education, Philosophy and life of saints in Catholic Church permitted him appropriate from everything he believed to be good to the application of his educational methods and range of his objectives.

In this work, I intend to demonstrate succinctly how Don Bosco seems to reedit in his workplace, nominated *Oratório,* some successful experiences in the History of Education, although his works have had much more expression and we must confer his competence merits and particular traits in the actions. After a quick reference review on the History of Education from the XV century on, it is already possible to find traces of pedagogical activities, both lay and religious, which will later be present in the activities of the Salesian Works' founder. Aiming to delimit the vast production field that could be approached to demonstrate such influence, I opted for a review of a few pastoral-pedagogical experiences of two History of Education characters, whose personal characteristics and activities, in different dimensions, offer the opportunity to identify the time approximation I am trying to establish with Don Bosco's educational actions. The characters I am talking about are Vitorino da Feltre (layman from the XV century) and Felipe Neri (religious man from the XVI century), whose educational initiatives that exerted significant impact in physical and artistic activities can be associated to what would happen later in the Don Bosco's Oratory in Valdocco (Turin/Italy) during the 18 hundreds.

This moment seems to be a good chance to follow, though slightly, a factual line in History to approach the characters mentioned above. After having presented Vitorino da Feltre, I situate him in the XV century, and it seems to be necessary to remind about a reality strongly present in the History of Education in the 15 hundreds: Renaissance Humanism. This movement is regarded by the ideological, political, theological and pedagogical point of view, as opposing the Middle Age period.

Among the great transformations occurred during this Renaissance, it is worth to highlight the interventions in Education, which were also provided by laymen, that is, scholars and teachers, not only by monks, friars and priests as in previous centuries, when Education was the clergymen's duty.

The Renaissance Humanism, with its knowledge renewal which took place at the same time as articulated adverse factors, disfigured or caused the disappearance of the cultural traditional patrimony existent until the Middle Ages It led to the constitution of a new pedagogy and foundation of schools where young people started to exercise according to the new ideal of formation. The ideal searched by humanists was the development of personality as a whole; the formation of body and soul by means of intellectual, moral and physical education, the intensive study of the Greek Latin letters, grammar and rhetoric. Even further, in the XVI century astronomy and social sciences were added to the list, as well as attention conferred by the masters to athletics, swimming, horse-riding, ball game and weapon handling. As for these last ones, the humanist educators also focused on Physical Education through body work, games and rides.

Gathering from the short scenario exposed above, humanist education used to be an aristocratic practice, that is, exclusive for the wealthy. It is known that only religious institutions gave some attention to the poor, but the only lay teacher, school director, humanist, pedagogue and truly pious person, due to his Christian condition, to have shown interest by poor students and also to have done anything for them was Vitorino da Feltre. Neri's actions, religious actions, also kept this trait.

**Vitorino da Feltre and Felipe Neri: different in lifestyles, similar in missions.**

When examined from the inside, the Salesian Tradition acknowledges the authorship of Don Bosco's works to Divine Providence. It is in this sense that in many writings of this tradition, we often find references to his vocation (in the religious sense) and his condition as a divine gift to the Church and society, which would have occurred in a propitious historical moment thanks to divine intervention, precisely, by the Holy Spirit's action. This comprises a large part of the documentation collected by the Catholic See to Don Bosco's Canonization Process which took place in 1934. However, from a "clinical" point of view of his "original" experience, it will be possible to deduce, according to what I am trying to show, that the Oratory's Pedagogy has found its bases not only in fragments extracted from the founder's childhood and adolescence (Borges, 2000), but also from previous experiences, as old in History of Education as in the History of the Church.

Alhough The Salesian Tradition labels the originality of Don Bosco's work, it is possible to find clues to understand this educator's experience bases when we transcend such Tradition. So, my intention will be now to show that, if "Valdocco's primitive Oratory" did not used to be something new at the time, we can then relate it to successful experiences in the XV and XVI centuries, both in lay and religious initiatives, which, if there isn't equal acknowledgement of Don Bosco's experience (not only the saint, but also the educator), there is a historical legitimacy of singular experiences favoring Education and youth.

The first significant experience I would like to talk about is Da Feltre's, an Italian from Padua, who lived from 1378 to 1446, Christian man and considered one of the most important educators, if not the most important, in the renaissance humanism of Italy and of the world. It is of great significance for this work the fact that Da Feltre was lay educator and also very important for the History of the Church researchers, since his pedagogical influences, grounded on Humanism, may be taken as some of the main references to the basics of what could be called Christian Humanism, originated in the end of Renaissance with the foundation of the Jesus's Company, one of the bases of the Counter Reform movement.

Da Feltre's contribution to education happened when it was applied to his Christian and humanist ideals in schooling for the young nobility in Padua (Italy), in a place called *Casa Giocosa*. Synthesizing other authors' studies, Perez (2003) says that what they intended to develop in this location was thorough education, according to the humanist ideal; hence, students had moral and intellectual education, without gender distinctions. They studied Greek, literature, Philosophy and History, declamation to improve eloquence, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. The appropriation of this knowledge, more closely related to the cognitive domain, happened along with the practice of games in order to make learning more pleasant, but there were also other physical activities, namely, horse-riding, high jumping, athletics, fencing, simulated war, ball games and also gymnastics.

According to Monroe (1972), Vitorino's biography writers state that the way education way presented in the *Giocosa* was something new, especially because of the methodological intervention that used games and physical activities. These activities developed by Da Feltre really resembled the ancient greek civilization, however, it can be said they were performed in a modern way, in a joyful and satisfying atmosphere.

Da Feltre understood that the environment itself was also an educational instrument, that's why Education historians like Plinval and Pittet (1954), Peeters & Cooman (1971) and Nunes (1980) describe the *Casa Giocosa* with cheering decorations, trees and plants spread around gardens and parks, fields for the games, panels showing boys and girls having fun. In other words, places where the young people could expand their natural joy, mainly in group activities. The characteristics of this group work can be accounted for Vitorino's mastership within public service, his method to lead the educational process, being of utmost importance, as well as his pioneering idea of the students' participation to maintain discipline, special attention to interests, characteristics and needs that are peculiar to children's development stage.

Da Feltre's experience, although realized mostly with the young nobility, did not exclude the participation of some kids coming from the poorer classes, considering that these were afforded by those. This kind of "Robin Hood effect" (charge the rich to pay for the poor), even though there are no accounts left by Vitorino, was widely studied by Nunes (1980), who revised the educator's biographies written by his disciples.

Being Vitorino a Christian educator and having produced works well seen by civilians and religious people, he seems to have taken his influence beyond the assumptions established by schools in Jesus's Company, reflecting later on the religious, educational, and promotional aid initiative from the XVI century called Oratory, whose foundation is acknowledge to Felipe Neri.

Felipe Neri is the second Italian character I point out in this work relating him to the proximal manifestations later identified in Valdocco (Turin) during the XIX century. He lived from 1515 to 1595 and his name is included in the list of saints canonized by the Catholic Church, despite not being so famous when compared to other saints, his spiritual merits are recognized as well as his "canonic patent" as the saint of the humorists. Leaving aside this last condition mentioned, I intend to approach him as an educator, whose trajectory in educational intervention needs to be considered within two great portions of personal experience: before and after his becoming a priest, what happened only after his 36$^{th}$ birthday, when a lot of his apostolic actions had already been consolidated.

Rome's social-political context during Felipe's time made this character get his life involved in favor to individuals in all types of needs. He helped the sick, the imprisoned, the convicted, the poor students, the orphans, singles, in short, everyone who suffered, that is why he started to structure aid institutions and count on other people's help, all moved by the joy and entertainment strategy which drew everyone's attentions. These were, at first, destined to helping the sick, however, they had a function in the apostolic field, since the ones with vices were taken there too, and they not only helped in treating the sick, but also helped themselves to correct their lives of vice, observing what could happen to them in case they did not quit their bad habits. Felipe's actions as an apostle announced his preference for the young generations, what came to mark the rest of his life. His surrender to the work was so deep that culminated in his becoming a priest, as an understanding of God's will. From this point on, his actions were intensively directed to his concern to give more spiritual assistance to those already lacking material assistance.

Sorgon (1988), synthesizes what appears in the works of other Education historians, like Monroe (1972) and Nunes (1980), as well as in Don Bosco's writings, that is Felipe's great passion for the young. This was the passion that moved him to search all resources to help the young and lead them to the good path. He soon noticed, in what was his characteristic, the power of joy, entertainment and game to conquer the young, and that is why he also played games. When there were no games, he kept everyone engaged and busy in order to avoid the evil, hence his initiative to teach little works and prayers. Due to the gathering of these practices: entertainment, prayer and work, in 1558 the Oratory appeared, in the church of *São Girolamo da Caridade*.

Nunes (1980) says that in the Oratory, the Christian doctrine was taught along with entertainment and work, in an environment filled with joy, music and singing. In spite of the great emphasis given to the last two dimensions - entertainment and work - Felipe prioritized his teachings on the love for God, and, considering that whoever loves also communicates, the prayer (considered to be communication with God) became a priority. In this sense, Campecelatro, quoted by Nunes (1980), provides the origin of the name "Oratory" given to the founded institution, saying this name was due to "Felipe's great love for prayer and the great wish he had to found a congregation for priests in which prayer would be life and soul" (p.105).

If we go back to Vitorino's and Felipe's brief presentations, though they have lived in different centuries and had different lifestyles, it would not be difficult to find parallel characteristics between them. One particular aspect interests me: joy, other than its great valorization as a strategy for attraction, it accumulates importance due to the educational value it contains.

**Joy: a happy man's fuel.**

Joy was a central issue within Vitorino and Felipe's actions: the first by spreading joy inside the *Casa Giocosa*, the second, since his own youth, attracted people with his joy (he used to be called the Good P*ipo*) until he was considered protector of comedians. If their joy influenced Don Bosco, I think it is convenient to observe how it is manifested throughout the historical moments in focus (XV and XVI centuries); in this case, similar terms such as joy, humor and laughter become objects of this study due to its close relation to entertainment and party, although other related terms like comic and comedy deserve comments in more propitious situations.

Because of the overlapping amount of humor, laughter and joyous elements, a common idea that could possibly articulate them would be their oppositions to seriousness. However, there can be found in works by Baktin (1987) and other authors who describe the history of laughter in the renaissance, the idea that laughter and humor, in nearly all Vitorino's and Felipe's periods, are bound to the ridicularization of others, and it is obvious that this idea kept these categories distant from the assumed Christian joy, filled with the divine grace which seems to be what guides the entire Christian tradition. But even if the humorous elements that had been very repressed for being often related to the vulgar, to the ridicularization or even ironical manifestations against established forces (i.e. parodies in artistic shows), the experiences with the joy seemed to be lived passionately according to the Christian heritage in both: the *Giocosa* and the *São Girolamo da Caridade*, or in other works related to the experiences of the educators. It is this evolution of the idea of joy as a manifestation of the state of grace, plain peace and celebration that seems to permeate Don Bosco's experiences in the Oratory of Valdocco in the 18 hundreds.

**Valdocco: new times in the C*asa Giocosa* and the *O*ratory of *São Girolamo da Caridade***

It is Don Bosco himself who provides the clues for our approximation among the characters of what I am nominating as the "Joy Pedagogy", in an important document he wrote and named *Panegírico de São Felipe Neri*. This document is a preaching to religious people in Turinese Alba / Italy, in 1868. Don Bosco took the chance to exalt Felipe Neri as a religious man and educator, stating he was a model to be imitated for being so excellent in his pastoral work and in his righteous path towards sanctity. For us, it is significant that among Neri's educational-pastoral methods, there also appears the use of physical activities that which were said to bring success for educational and sanctification. From the transcription of Ceria et al, found at Borges (2005:124) we can read the following text from the *panegírico* (eulogy) which allows us to conclude what has been said:

**"Felipe received them lovingly and patted them; to one gave a caramel, to another a medal, an image, a book and similar things. To the most rebel and ignorant ones that had no disposition to that sublime treatment of paternal benevolence, he prepared something more adapted, only to draw them by his side. Told them pleasant stories, invited them to sing, play and represent theatrical pieces, jump and all kinds of entertainment. Finally, the most resisting ones, the arrogant ones were, as it were, were dragged to parks by musical instruments, the *bochas, zancos* (*long wooden walking sticks), *tejos* (*popular game played with rocks), baskets of fruits and foods, breakfasts and snacks. Every expense, said Felipe, every fatigue, every malady, every sacrifice is not enough when the objective is to conquer souls to God (observations of my own)"**

When we read excerpts from the eulogy in which Don Bosco refers to Felipe in this manner - and the information is corroborated by biographical data about the Renaissance educator - it seems that we are watching Bosco himself describe his own activities. In another work (Borges, 2005), I show various excerpts describing the Oratory of Valdocco, which show clearly the same initiatives developed in *São Girolamo da Caridade*. In the mentioned work, using Alves's words, I wrote that singing, praying, learning, laughing and playing were the life in the Oratory. Among the activities there were indoctrination, learning a workmanship, recreation where "… the games, the snares and the ball, the war simulations and robberies of imaginary castles, other dexterity games and gymnastics put hundreds of students to move" (Alves, 1944: p.134).

On another occasion (Borges, 2002), also said that some activities performed in the playground earned great relevance, not only by the values Don Bosco conferred them, but also because was an inheritance brought by the educator from his own youth education. Thus, the games, music, theatre and rides became very important activities in the Oratory, vital elements to the playground and efficient methods to achieve education.

From the brief scenario exposed above, I believe it is sufficient to reinforce the reelaborations of Felipe Neri's experiences and, even farther, Vitorino's (to whom Felipe relates) too. This reinforces the argument I use that is sustained by Le Goff (1996) concerning the possibility that facts that occur in present time are remakes of past facts that often base their developments in the realities of the current time. In Don Bosco's case, the secular realities of his time could have contributed to his success, bound to other possibilities, indicated in Borges (2005), related to the aspects of the romantic movement from the XVIII and XIX centuries.

**To wrap it up**

When we find ourselves involved in the difficult task of finishing what insists to go on, we feel the necessity to use resources to make the continuation of our reflections possible, to sustain our arguments and open space to continue the academic debate. It is in this sense that we appeal to Lê Goff's(1996) idea to sustain that human experiences seem to renew themselves in time, connecting past and present in a narrow way, allowing us to see that the facts are not completely new, but a remake of experiences with new dimensions adapted from time to time. That is why it would not be too much too infer that Don Bosco's experiences in the 18 hundreds as reelaborations of Vitorino's and Felipe's ones, and that without depriving Don Bosco's works of its merits. As it is seen in biographic accounts of the mentioned characters and in the descriptions of the works in which their experiences were developed, many activities performed in the Oratory of *São Girolamo* (and even in the *Casa Giocosa*), with special attention to the valorization of the category represented by joy. However, a more careful look will identify, in Don Bosco's works, something which marks his singularities at the same level of proximity kept with some specific characteristics from his time, what I have found in my studies, but still need to be studied in depth.

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Key-words: Joy, Education, History

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**REELABORATIONS AND PARTICULARIZATIONS: NOTES ON DOM BOSCO'S EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES GROUNDED ON VITORINO DA FELTRE AND FELIPE NERY.**

**ABSTRACT**

This paper refers to a part of a concluded study and in the present section I specifically approach one of Lê Goff's postulates. According to this author, it is possible that determined phenomena or facts occurred in a given period may be characterized as modernisms of previous occurrences. In this manner, studying a traditional proposition for education - the Salesians', implemented by the Italian priest and educator John Bosco (Don Bosco) during the 18 hundreds - I was able to perceive

evidence indicating many similarities between this proposition's original pedagogic elements and others occurred during the XV and XVI centuries with Vitorino da Feltre and Felipe Neri, respectively. The few records available on the works developed by Vitorino in a place called *Casa Giocosa*, as well as the non-abundant records on Felipe's works initiated in a place called *Oratório de São Girolamo da Caridade* allowed me to find pedagogic elements and characteristics common to both experiences, despite Vitorino's lay character and the strict religiosity in Felipe's works. Among these characteristic elements, I will focus on a special one - the joy - for this element appeared in a prominently positive way in Bosco's experience in the *Oratório de São Francisco de Sales*. The argumentation was built from the presentation of various primary and secondary sources in Salesian tradition. But the main source was a document named *Panegírico de São Felipe Neri*, written by Don Bosco himself. It is the source analysys, of the *Panegírico* (Eulogy) mainly, that allowed the necessary argumentations to sustain the hypothesis and led to favorable my final comments corroborating the hypothesis.

Key-words: Joy, Education, History

**RÉÉLABORATION ET PARTICULARITÉS : NOTES SUR L'EXPÉRIENCE ÉDUCATIVE DE DON BOSCO FONDÉE SUR VITTORINO DA FELTRE ET PHILIPPE NERI**

**RÉSUMÉ**

Le texte dont il s'agit est relatif à une partie d'une étude conclue, et, dans ce cadre, je fais une approche spécifique à partir d'un postulat de Le Goff. Selon cet auteur, il est possible que certains faits, phénomènes ou événements survenus à un temps donné, se caratérisent comme des modernismes de quelque chose ayant existé antérieurement. En étudiant la tradition d'une proposition éducative - celle de l'ordre sálésien, mise en place par le prêtre éducateur italien Jean Bosco (Don Bosco) dans les années dix huit cent -je remarquai des évidences indiquant plusieurs similitudes entre les éléments pédagogiques originaux de cette proposition et d'autres interventions éducatives survenues aux XVème et XVIème siècles avec, respectivement, Vittorino da Feltre et Philippe Neri. Le peu de traces disponibles sur l'oeuvre de Vittorino développée dans la «Casa Giocosa », et les marques peu plus abondantes sur l'oeuvre de Philippe, entamée dans l'« Oratoire de Saint Girolamo de la Charité », me permirent de détecter des caractéristiques et des éléments pédagogiques communs entre les deux expériences, malgré le caractère laïc de Vittorino et celui, strictement religieux de Philippe. Parmi ces éléments, j'en soulignerai un en particulier - la joie - car c'est celui qui émergea de façon le plus remarquablement positif dans l'expérience des années dix huit cent de Don Bosco dans l'« Oratoire de Saint Francis de Sales ». Les argument s purent être construits à partir de la présentation de diverses sources primaires et secondaires de la tradition salésienne, cependant, la principale source se constitua d'un « Panégyrique de Saint Philippe Néri », écrit par Don Bosco lui-même. C'est l'analyse des sources, notamment du Panégyrique qui me permit de soutenir les argumentations nécessaires au maintien de l'hypothèse et me conduit aux considérations finales favorables à la confirmation de cette même hypothèse.

Mots-clés : Joie, Éducation, Histoire.

**EL REELABORACIÓN Y PARTICULARIDADES: APUNTES SOBRE LA EXPERIENCIA EDUCATIVA DE DON BOSCO BASADA EN VITORINO DA FELTRE Y FELIPE NERI.**

RESUMEN

El texto en cuestión, remitese a una parte de un estudio concuído, y en esta sección hago un abordaje específica partiendose de un postulado de Lê Goff .

Según este autor, es posible que ciertos acontecimientos o fenomenos que ocurren en un tiempo puedan caracterizarse como modernismos de algo ocurrido anteriormente. De este modo, estudiando una propuesta educativa - la Salesiana, puesta en practica por el cura educador e Italiano João Bosco (Don Bosco) en los ochocientos - pude percibir evidencias que señalaron muchas similitudes entre los elementos pedagógicos originales de tal propuesta y otras intervenciones educativas ocurridas en los siglos XV y XVI con Vitorino da Feltre y Felipe Neri, respectivamente.

Los pocos registros disponibles sobre la obra de Vitorino desarrollada en el ambiente denominado **"Casa Giocosa"**, así como los registros poco más caudalosos sobre la obra de Felipe empezada en el ambiente nombrado "Oratorio de San Girolamo de la Caridad", permitieronme hallar a la presencia de características y elementos pedagógicos corrientes entre las dos experiencias, apesar del carácter laico de Vitorino y del carácter estrictamente religioso de la obra de Felipe. Entre los elementos característicos, pondré atención a uno en especial - la alegría - pues este elemento emergió de modo prominentemente positivo en la experiencia ochocentista de Don Bosco al ambiente denominado "Oratorio de San Francisco de Sales".

Los argumentos pudieron ser construídos partiendose de la presentación de várias fuentes primárias y secondárias de tradición salesiana, pero la principal fuente se ha constituído de un documento llamado de "Hálago de San Felipe Neri", escrito por el própio Don Bosco. Es la análisis de las fuentes, sobretodo del hálago, que me permitieron hacer las argumentaciones necesárias a la sustentación de la hipótesis y que me conducieron a las consideraciones finales favorables a la confirmación de tal hipótesis.

Palabras Clave: Alegría, Educación, Historia.

**REELABORAÇÃO E PARTICULARIDADES: NOTAS SOBRE A EXPERIÊNCIA EDUCATIVA DE DOM BOSCO FUNDAMENTADA EM VITORINO DA FELTRE E FELIPE NERI**

RESUMO

O texto em questão refere-se a uma parte de um estudo concluído, e nessa seção faço uma abordagem específica a partir de um postulado de Lê Goff. Segundo esse autor, é possível que determinados fatos, fenômenos ou acontecimentos, que ocorrem em um tempo possam se caracterizar como modernismos de algo ocorrido em períodos anteriores. Desse modo, estudando a tradição de uma proposta educativa - a dos salesianos, implementada pelo sacerdote educador italiano João Bosco (Dom Bosco) no oitocentos - pude perceber evidências que indicavam muitas semelhanças entre os elementos pedagógicos originais dessa tal proposta e outras intervenções educativas ocorridas nos séculos XV e XVI com Vitorino da Feltre e Felipe Neri, respectivamente. Os poucos registros disponíveis sobre a obra de Vitorino desenvolvida no ambiente denominado de "*Casa Giocosa*", assim como os registros pouco mais abundantes sobre a obra de Felipe iniciada no ambiente denominado de "*Oratório de São Girolamo da Caridade*", permitiram-me encontrar a presença de características e elementos pedagógicos comuns entre as duas experiências, apesar do caráter laico de Vitorino e do caráter estritamente religioso da obra de Felipe. Entre os elementos característicos chamarei a atenção para um em especial - a alegria - pois é esse mesmo elemento que emergiu de maneira proeminentemente positiva na experiência oitocentista de Dom Bosco no ambiente denominado de "*Oratório de São Francisco de Sales*". Os argumentos puderam ser construídos a partir da apresentação de diversas fontes primárias e secundárias da tradição salesiana, mas, a principal fonte se constituiu de um documento denominado de "Panegírico de São Felipe Néri", escrito pelo próprio Dom Bosco. É a análise das fontes, sobretudo do Panegírico, que me permitiram fazer as argumentações necessárias à sustentação da hipótese e que me conduziram às considerações finais favoráveis à confirmação da tal hipótese.

Palavras-chave: Alegria, Educação, História.