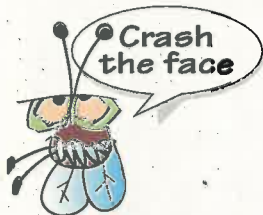


Because this is the language which is spoken all over the world. If you speak English you can keep in contact with the friends you met during the summer; you are able to use a computer; you can understand the texts of your favourite songs and read the English article about the Take That. In other words, you feel a citizen of the world. Welcome.



THE HUMAN TOY

It's not a new kind of toy you can buy in a shop, it's an ordinary child whom other children turned into a sort of living object, in order to play nasty and cruel jokes on him. Yes, they call them jokes, though actually they are real acts of violence. The victims are quiet and shy schoolmates or neighbours of the same age, they're often anxious and sensitive children who are unable to react, so they accept aggression passively.

The "persecutors" are children who suffer from aggressiveness towards everybody, adults included, which means parents and teachers, and they have great problems in communicating. A weak and defenceless person represents the only chance for them to merge and to be taken into consideration.

"Bullying" is the word which was coined to describe this behaviour that has been increasing dangerously; in our Primary Schools the "victims" reach 45.9%: they can be insulted, robbed of their money, or food, or garments, they can be beaten. Sometimes the bullying degenerates; we may even have read in the newspapers incredible stories about the murder of a young girl or boy by another child. Males are more violent, females tend to use heavy sarcasm and irony.

Generally bullies are children who come from ordinary families, where they live a comfortable life, at least from an economic point of view, but they receive too little love and care and too much freedom. They spend a lot of time by themselves, in front of the television, where they watch films or cartoons in which the heroes

are strong and loved because of their violence. These children are often punished by being beaten, a quick and hasty punishment without a word to explain what they have done wrong. They usually repeat what they've experienced, of course, changing their role.

In Europe the situation is worrying; the percentage of children who admitted they were victims of their schoolmates is 27% in England, 9% in Norway, 8% in Ireland, 15% in Spain.

"Ijime" is the Japanese term for bullying, but it presents some peculiar characteristics. Teachers tolerate and sometimes also perform it, in the name of discipline and uniformity, which are the bases of Japanese schooling. The aim of every child in Japan is to be a good student from infancy; the Japanese child is obsessed with school, because to have success in life

you have to attend the right university; and to attend the right university you must count on the best Middle and Secondary Schools. In the "juku", the full-time classes, you find that 64.2% of the pupils are between 12 and 15: there, students and teachers live under continuous pressure and, as nobody cares about socialisation, the students end up projecting their worries and intolerance on each other.

Over the last 15 months, 14 children have died in Japan: they killed themselves to escape from the nightmare they lived in, they couldn't stand all that violence any more. That's what they wrote before taking their lives and many young boys and girls refuse to go to school. The Ministry of Education has already apportioned 500 million yen to promote prevention programmes; Great Britain has similar programmes; Norway is ready to approve a law which punishes the crimes of bullying. Italy is conducting research to study the problem. It has been proved that ex-bullies reach a level of criminality that is four times higher than in other adults of the same age.

Anyway, the bullied children must not accept violence in silence; if they look around they will certainly find a relative, a teacher or a friend, who will be able to help them; actually, bullies are undoubtedly dangerous, but they are also very weak and frightened children.



Antonella Ferri