Reexamining the Disappearance of Childhood: How Has Neil Postman Been Received?

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In this paper, I first critique the theory of "the disappearance of childhood" developed by Neil Postman in his book of the same name, basing my discussion on recent research in several fields, including education, psychology, and sociology. I then reexamine how Postman's theory has been received in Japan, chiefly among researchers in education and other fields, and discuss my views on the direction that future educational research should take, together with related topics.

In The Disappearance of Childhood, Postman argues that childhood is on the verge of disappearing due to the influence of visual media, in particular. In this paper I suggest that, on the contrary, we could say that childhood is currently being reestablished, judging by the evidence of studies on the acquisition of the ability to read visual media and the recent trend in educational policy of attempting to keep children away from contact with media that are harmful to their growth.

Next, I discuss how Japanese researchers in education and other fields have received Postman's thesis, while looking at three examples. I show that they have tended to receive it uncritically, treating the disappearance of childhood as a given in constructing their own theories. Further, I develop the hypothesis that we must consider, as a factor underlying this tendency, how Japanese educational research since the 1970s has been influenced by critiques of modern schooling.