Expectancies as factors influencing conditional discrimination performance of children.
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AB Three experiments investigated the effects of a differential outcomes procedure on children's conditional discrimination performance. Participants were 45 Ss, aged 4 yrs to 5 yrs 9 mo; 31 Ss, aged 4 yrs 1 mo to 7 yrs 6 mo; and 4 Ss, aged 5 yrs 3 mo to 5 yrs 8 mo. Findings demonstrate that children taught using the differential outcomes procedure in a conditional discrimination task learn faster, have expectancies for outcomes, and can rely on these expectancies to solve new discriminative choice problems involving the same outcomes. This facilitative effect of differential outcomes also appears when different tokens are the immediate reinforcer. Findings support an expectancy theory of reinforcement with potential applied significance as an adjunct to teaching and training of difficult discriminations.