The differential effectiveness of social reinforcement with children in laboratory and natural settings: A conditioned reinforcement analysis.

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AB Uses data from the literature to describe the effectiveness of social consequences as positive reinforcers for children in natural settings and their weaknesses as such in laboratory settings. An argument based on the methodology of conditioned reinforcement research is developed to account for this discrepancy. Parallels are drawn between (a) methods for establishing and assessing conditioned reinforcers and (b) the contexts in which social reinforcers are established and delivered. Neither conditioned nor social reinforcers are very effective when delivered in isolation from the conditions in which they presumably acquire their function--the training conditions of conditioned reinforcers or the natural environment of social reinforcers. The more complex scheduling methods used in recent conditioned reinforcement research are analogous to the complex conditions under which social reinforcers are delivered in the natural environment; in these cases, the stimuli are substantially more effective as reinforcers.