

Accepted Manuscript

Title: Conspecific observational learning by adult dogs in a training context

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PII: S0168-1591(15)00307-X
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1016/j.applanim.2015.11.003>
Reference: APPLAN 4152

To appear in: *APPLAN*

Received date: 22-7-2015
Revised date: 27-10-2015
Accepted date: 15-11-2015

Please cite this article as: Scandurra, A., Mongillo, P., Marinelli, L., Aria, M., D' Aniello, B., Conspecific observational learning by adult dogs in a training context, *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* (2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2015.11.003>

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1 Conspecific observational learning by adult dogs in a training context

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15 **Abstract**

16 The role of observational learning in dogs has drawn great interest from the scientific
17 community. However, only a few studies explored its potential use for training purposes. The aim
18 of the present study was to assess the potential benefit of conspecific observational learning in a dog
19 training context. Fifty adult Labrador retrievers were recruited at the Italian Water Rescue School.
20 Dogs were equally distributed between basic and advanced training level and assigned to
21 demonstration and control groups.

22 The experimental procedure consisted of two phases: Phase 1, intended to ascertain that dogs
23 could not perform the selected exercise when requested by their handlers; Phase 2, to assess
24 whether they would perform the same exercise after the observation of a conspecific demonstrator.
25 The tests were performed outdoors in a fenced training area and one out of two dynamic exercises
26 were selected for each dog: jumping on a trunk or hop on a slide for children. The outcome of Phase

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