

Peer- and self-assessment: A Case Study to Improve the Students' Learning Ability*

Ying Li

School of Foreign Languages, Lanzhou University of Finance and Economics, Gansu, China

Liping Chen

School of Foreign Languages, Yunnan Agricultural University, Yunnan, China

Abstract—Current assessment practices in college English in China do not develop students' abilities to reflect on their own learning. Peer- and self- assessment, the self-reflection phrase, can be seen as a means to tackle this problem. The purpose of the study was to explore the potential to take Peer and self-assessment as an effective method to change the way of students' learning. An analysis of 60 students from Lanzhou University of Finance and Economics showed that peer and self- assessment can change the way the students' learning. These two forms of assessment are often used in combination with each other. Implementation of these forms of assessment can involve the development of a learning teaching environment and shift the students' learning methods from surface approaches to learning to deep approaches to learning gradually.

Index Terms—self-assessment, peer-assessment, surface approaches to learning, deep approaches to learning

I. INTRODUCTION

As teachers in higher education we need to be clear about what students have to learn, the level of that learning, the methods of learning and teaching to enable that learning, and how to assess what we have asked them to learn. Boud (1981, 2007, 2010) repeatedly placed emphasis on assessments from 1988 until 2010, especially in higher education. He stressed assessment has a major influence on what and how students learn, which is greater than any other single factor and the impact of teaching material. The method of assessment determines the way in which students approach their learning process (Sande and Adarsh, 2014). Biggs (2007, p163) again suggests "What and how students learn depends to a major extent on how they think they will be assessed". Therefore, assessment has great effects on how and what students learn and we should make the right assessment in the teaching.

Carless et al. (2006, p396) states "assessment processes should involve students' activity". Harrison et al. (2015, p76) argues "self- and peer-assessment is a sustainable lifelong learning methodology". In twenty-first century, we believe in lifelong learning, which supports and officially recognizes off-campus learning. Students need experience of self-assessment against criteria. So Assessment should facilitate learning, and at the same time, what the students could do and how to do it in the future study should be concentrated on in assessment. Assessment is the central element in the quality of teaching and learning in higher education. The well-designed assessment involves clear expectations, provides opportunities for students to self-monitor themselves, receive feedback. Along with the changes in learning theory, several instructional innovation and alternative assessment methods found their way into teaching practice.

During the last decade, teachers developed and implemented alternative assessment methods in educational practice, which changed theories in the students' learning. This paper aims to test the use of peer and self-assessment as a new innovation to change the way we assess, then analyze the benefits of peer- and self-assessment, assessment of participation and negotiated assessment, and finally make a conclusion that a number of issues are identified and addressed.

English learning in China is test-oriented learning. The methods for assessing the students in English of our University are exam and coursework. The school gives the mid-term and the final exams. For example, the student got 80 marks in the mid-term examination, namely, he has learned and mastered the content and the main language points well before the mid-term exam. The summative assessment usually includes several parts---10% of mid-term exam; final exam 70%; spoken exam 10%; assignments 10%. It is the most important assessment for the students to get the result of the final overall marker. There is only some limited formative assessment in our teaching. Some students don't get their desirable scores, because they are passive learners, they do not have the motivation and confidence to learn English. The traditional assessment is usually good at evaluation, namely giving the students the result of learning, and often misses some advice and support that students need most in their studies. The examinations provide a reasonable effective means of measuring individual knowledge of the course, but encourage surface learning.

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Nowadays some teachers want to change, especially for spoken English exam, we want to give students continuous assessment, we want to use oral presentation subjected to peer and self-assessment.

Use innovatory assessment in some students of Lanzhou University of Finance and Economics in 2012, choosing and using “fit-for purpose” assessment. Introducing peer and self- assessment approaches into English teaching may be beneficial to strengthening the relationship between teacher feedback and students learning, encouraging student to change the way of students learning. Is peer and self-assessment different and better than the traditional assessment methods?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Assessment always defines the actually curriculum, from the students point of view. Kinett & Knight (1996) states that assessment intends to build up each part of the students’ learning experience, which often defines what the student takes as important. Assessments are effective in instructing learning, the teacher should provide good feedback to the students, which has deep influence on learning. Therefore, the formative assessment can be helpful. Assessment sends message about the standards and amount of work required. Too much assessment results in superficial approaches and provides fertile ground for deep approaches, in which what has to be learned, and why it has to be learned are taken priorities (Ramsden, 2003). Rust (2006) argues that assessment should be an intrinsic part of the learning process and not something “tacked on” the end of the programme. So the teacher should make every effort to make the criteria for assessment explicit and public rather than hidden and vague.

The goals of assessment in higher education are:

- to lead and introduce effective methods to learning.
- to measure expected learning outcomes validly and reliably.
- to define and protect academic standards.
- to emphasize on what has been achieved by individual learners
- to help students to apply abstract principles to practical contexts
- to motivate students and focus on learning

The study of Orsmond et al., (1997) states that according to criteria a student’s ability to mark does not measure, but the self-assessment is a successful and effective formative assessment tool. Peer and self assessment are judged not only simply by from the agreement between students and teacher mark, but also by how much the students develops during such stages of the assessment process. Peer- and self-assessment are student-led assessment practices with the potential to positively affect achievement (Harris & Brown, 2013). Is the student changing the way of learning while carrying out the assessment, or does the student learn from the product of assessment?

A. Approaches to Assessment

“Assessment is often described as being either formative or summative”, said Brown & Glasner (2003). Assessment is for learning formative, the results of it are used for feedback during learning. Feedback can improve the learning of individual students and also improve the teaching. The term formative assessment means constructive feedback provided for students in order to improve their learning skills. Therefore, formative assessment means the feedback provided on all assignments and is separate from any (overall) marks that students get (Gallen, A & McCloughry, J 2007).

Assessment is for learning summative, which carried out after the teaching has taken place and the results are used to grade students at the end of a unit or programme. It is largely numerical and concerned mainly with making evaluation judgement, such as an end- of-programme exam, final-year exam.

B. What Effect Does Assessment Have on Learning?

Biggs (2003, p141) stated that teacher’s and student’s perspective on assessment, in which assessment is the ending of the teaching–learning sequence of event to the teacher, but assessment is the beginning to the students. Biggs concluded them as the following:

Teacher Perspective: objectives→teaching activities→assessment

↓

Student Perspective: assessment→learning activities →outcomes

Struyven, Dochy and Janssens (2005) reviewed students perceptions of assessment in higher education and found that students study behavior is influenced by the assessment modes in use. They summarized approaches to learning among students groups as surface approaches where the learner does engage significantly with the task but accomplish the learning task; deep approaches to learning where the learner want to understand the study the material and the learning outcomes are of higher quality. Learning is considered a social activity which exists in a specific circumstance where informal learning is more important than the formal. Students can usually learn more from the formal and informal assessments offered by their peers or themselves. Assessment should be part of instruction, telling students about how they are doing and making students believe that they can succeed if they keep studying (Ramsden, 2003; Stiggins & Chappuis, 2012).

III. SELF-ASSESSMENT AND PEER-ASSESSMENT

Fautley and Savage (2008, p51) stated “peer-assessment involves students assessing the work of other students, their peers; while self-assessment involves each individual in a consideration of their own work”.

Assessment is a very emotional experience. It is an effective learning tool (Sande and Adarsh, 2014). Even if the same feedback is given to different students, each student will still react in a very different way. A strong student who is full of confidence may regard the feedback as a help, while a weak student who lacks of confidence may draw back and even want to give up. So all of these should be noticed, which needs teachers lead in new assessment to encourage the students to learn.

A. *Lead in Innovation*

We learned that, while traditionally in English study most of the assessment which takes place is “assessment of learning”, a more desirable strategy would be adopt “assessment for learning”. To achieve the latter, teachers could incorporate some new formative assessment to our teaching. If we lead in innovation via the self –assessment and peer-assessment in our teaching, we will change the way of students’ learning.

All of my students are from different schools: School of Statistics, School of Finance and School of Accounting, who major in several specialties; such as Statistics, International Trade, International Finance, Accounting and so on. Most of their entrance scores are over 100 (the total score is 150). They are class 4(A). Some of them come from villages, towns and cities in very rural parts of Gansu Province. Some of them from other provinces in China are good at English. Most of students don’t do well in it, being afraid of doing the exercises in the textbook. They don’t like thinking about the reason of the exercises. They feel nervous when they speak in front of the class. They do the exercises not because of their interests, just because of the final overall marks they attach importance to, which leads to the students adopting a surface learning method—surface learners. How can I change the way of students learning? The teaching should be tried to make the students choose deep approaches to learning.

B. *Developing Self-assessment and Peer Assessment*

Sadler (1989) indicates that a key objective for higher education should change students from depending on assessment from teachers to judging the quality of what they are learning by themselves. Self-assessment includes reflection, which is being used in a variety of ways to assess skills, knowledge and competence (Brown& Glasner, 2003).

Self-assessment involves students, guided by the teacher, who decides what the appropriate assessment criteria are, and then sees how well they have met these criteria. The self-assessment which can be regarded as either a process or an activity involves reflection, but not all reflection is self-assessment, particular is useful for our large class.

Peer assessment involves students making judgment about, or commenting upon each other’s work. It is really helpful in provide students formative assessment, perhaps when students are undertaking tasks without marks that count. Group may comment on the work of individuals or groups. Using peer assessment may derive from the desire to reduce the teacher’s marking load, or for more pedagogical reasons, such as a belief in ability of peer assessment to develop important skill when students graduate.

For instance, two students comment the other four or five students’ compositions and try to find the errors in them; they will give explanations about the error or structures after the assessments. Students assess other students with whom they have been studying, which can be valuable when individuals and groups are assessing the products or performances of each other.

At last I will give more useful in terms of feedback, so that students’ learning is enhanced, motivate students to learn. The module we try to use formative feedback and link to deep learning (feed forward). In higher education the concept of peer-assessment are being paid more and more attention to, which can be taken as an educational progress in which students assess the work’s quality of their peer students and provide each other with feedback (Berg, Admiraal & Pilot, 2006).

C. *The Implementation of Self-assessment and Peer Assessment*

We use the following steps to carry out the self-assessment and peer-assessment.

---The first step was to discuss with the students on the appropriate set of criteria and an acceptable procedure.

--- Students selected the topics for the presentation and self-selection of groups which were to give the presentation. Each group had his English name.

---Group prepared the presentation materials.

---Group took presentations and peer assessment of them. When each group performance, the other students were asked to fill in peer-assessment forms, they must assess the performance of the group as a whole and of the individual students of the group.

--- After giving performance, the students were to fill in self-assessment form.

---Finally, the students made individual reflection and group discussions.

1. The Usage of self-assessment

To change the preceding assessment, I first ask my first year students of Class 4(A) to write the short passage by them, and then I give them the two sample writings to modify their composition using self-assessment. The objectives

of the writing are to review the writing structure learned in the unit and to develop the students' writing skills in composition. In particular I want to encourage them to challenge themselves to find the mistakes they made in their writing, familiar with the expressions of English not Chinese-style English, and to learn what valid and valuable structure of this kind of pattern is. For Example, after I taught the College English Unit One, I asked the students do write a composition. The students are given the following instructions:

1. Understand the writing pattern cause –and –effect.
2. Write a 120 word paragraph of this writing pattern
3. Hand in your paragraph to me on time.

This is the structured writing example:

Detailed Outline

Topic: Enjoying Learning English Online

Cause: offer much freedom in time to think out what to say in English/have more chances to talk with native speaks

Effect: understand about almost everything in English/teach me the value of my effort/get insights into a lot of new things

The students will check their paragraphs according to the two different samples. The two samples are both good and bad written work, designed to focus attention on key assessment criteria. After I explain the writing pattern of good and bad, they are asked to read their own paragraphs again and during their reading, they need to make notes in the margin on how well their work meets the sample we have read. I had originally thought that they would be loose on themselves, but on the contrary, their self-assessments are typically sharp and surprisingly honest instead. It is not usual for me to point out the mistakes that haven't been noticed in students' own work. Nevertheless, some of students still don't trust their own judgments and ask me for confirming that their self-assessments are correct. It may be indicates that I still have some ways to go in guiding them to be fully responsible for assessing the quality of what they are learning. Self-assessment is more effective than the teacher feedback. The self-assessment usually refers to the students' assessments on all aspects of their work, including the fields of vocabulary, grammar, originality, style, structure, etc., and critical thinking in producing a written assignment that integrated all aspects being improved in the reflection.

2. The Usage of peer-assessment

Although all students will recognize assessment of knowledge easily, assessment of process is likely to be new. Assessment of process refers to assessment well beginning with making judgments about the effectiveness of each phase of the activity.

I use a varied range of assignments: three-minute oral report, group presentation on the background information, presentation of written assignment, classroom debate. Make use of the chances which can encourage students to engage all the vocabulary achieved to realize the effective outcome; for instance, small group's problem-based activities, telling stories by pictures, guessing games, group-discussion, peering-teaching, etc. I can motivate my students positively.

For example, participation in a study group, group presentation on the background information relating to the text. When the students are going to be asked to peer and self assessment, the students use the table 3 and table 4 in the appendix, which is modified from Roach (2003), to assess the other students or himself / herself presentation. They may give the mark (100 score) according to their presentation. The marks the students awarded themselves were generally higher than I had expected them to be. Table 1 shows the percentages of students in the classes having awarded themselves grades of fail, pass, and good, excellent.

TABLE 1

Grade	Fail	Pass	Good	Excellent
Students' award	0%	20%	45%	35%
My award	2%	45%	38%	15%

(Percentage award of grades awards for the presentation by the students and which would have been awarded for the presentation by me.)

IV. RESULT FROM STUDENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaires were distributed to sixty students, who were required to fill in them after the group discussion and presentation, and were handed in by the end of the experiment. Table 2 shows the results of the questionnaire.

TABLE 2.
STUDENTS RESPONSE TO QUESTIONNAIRES GIVEN OUT AT THE END OF THE ASSESSMENT PRESENTATION

The scheme of self/peer assessment makes you:					
Independent	36	Dependent	16	Neither	18
Think more	48	Not think more	5	Neither	7
Learn more	43	Not learn any more	8	Neither	8
Gain confidence	48	Lack confidence	6	Neither	6
Critical	41	Uncritical	2	Neither	17
Change way of learning	48	not change way of learning	8	Neither	4
The scheme of self/peer assessment is:					
Enjoyable	39	Not enjoyable	12	Neither	9
Easy	18	Hard	30	Neither	12
Time saving	10	Time consuming	45	Neither	5
Beneficial	51	Not beneficial	1	Neither	8
Helpful	48	Not helpful	3	Neither	9
Challenge	42	Not challenge	12	Neither	6

(Modified from Falchikov, 1986)

V. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

Figure indicates the number of students' responses. There are 60 students in the class. These show that 88% of students thought that the innovation of self –assessment and peer-assessment had been beneficial to them. 80% of students considered it made them think more, gain confidence and helpful, which had changed the way of their learning. About 70% of the students felt that they had learned more and had become more critical. A similar number of students 70% found the activity full of challenge.

I compare the learning outcome of our class with the other two teachers, the atmosphere in our class is much better than theirs. The approaches of the students learning in some parts change a lot. When they read the text they want to prepare them before the lesson, searching the information relating to the text, discussing the materials in group, it is obvious that the students have active exchange of idea, try to use deep learning, forming the idea of more productive and inspired research. They were building on the material that was their own, not material given to them. According the result of questionnaires we can know that the benefits of self –assessment and peer-assessment.

- Feedback is faster, and it can be clearer than the teacher assessment.
- Students are very active recipient of knowledge, but play a more active role in identifying where they need to improve and monitoring their own progress.
- Students are encouraged to critically think what standards and criteria are, what's the differences between contents and contexts.
- Students assess the other students who can touch areas they would not normally reach.
- The teacher can associate with the process of learning rather than just the outcome.
- It provided valuable practice in presenting and leading to increase confidence by assessing.
- Doing the presentation helped the students reflect on what they want to present,
- Change the way of learning from the surface approach to deep approach, searching the material through internet, analyzing the contents.
- To add variety to students' learning experience.
- To put the students in the overall class.

The self-assessment and peer-assessment are therefore process-oriented rather than outcome-oriented. These assessments may encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning. They would also encourage students to assess the extent of their effort and the quality of their outcome. The students would consider how effectively they finished group work and examine reflexively their own behavior as members of group. And what's more, peer and self-assessment practices contribute to strengthening students' learning including the improvement of life-long skills, metacognitive competencies or affective abilities (Brew 1999; Topping 2003).

Brew (2003) argues that involving students in their own assessment is increasing, whether self-assessment or peer assessment, and leads the students to develop the skills of independent, autonomous judgment. So after their assessment they find doing exercise is more interesting, meaningful, worthwhile, and easier to understand and therefore they are likely to spend time on them. Students using a deep approach appear more able to demonstrate their understanding. By the time the students have the intrinsically motivation, they will become more confident and have a positive attitude towards their study, which can enhance their study value (Chen&Jaswinker, 2012). They can learn from their mistakes or difficulties, comparing their achievements with those of their peers'. They can get a great deal of feedback from each other, which is more than the teacher can give. They can be encouraged to make judgments to get into a better position.

VI. LIMIT AND FURTHER STUDY

The most obvious limitation of self-assessment and peer-assessment is the difficulty of implementing it with a large group of students; it will take too much time for the students to finish the assessment.

Another limitation is the weaker students in the group usually need the support of the teacher. They need the teacher to deal with their grammatical inaccuracies, in order to solve their problems. So it is necessary to address linguistic issues, therefore they reap benefits from the peer assessment exercise. The use of peer and self-assessment in group work situation for evaluating student contributes to group work, a various kinds of activates.

In the future teaching, we will pay attention to the following issues:

1. It's better for the group size to be small, not too large.
2. Students need to be conscious of the standards used for self and peer assessment.
3. Students have to be skillful in carrying out peer assessment.

Brown and Knight (1994) state that students, who take part in peer assessment for the first time, need the tutor to provide them with the performance criteria on which they can assess their peers. When students have mastered this skill, they are able to assess their peers in a correct way.

All students are different but the assessment for every student tends to be the same. The marks students gave tended to raise, not to lower them. They gave the result of being assessment group the same mark. The teacher can give some advice to students making presentation. When we design assessment, we should pay attention to the principles of assessment. Race et al.(2005) propose some suggestions for assessment design:

- 1) Assessment should be valid.
- 2) Assessment should be reliable.
- 3) Assessment should be transparent.
- 4) Assessment should be authentic.
- 5) Assessment should motivate students learning.
- 6) Assessment should promote deep learning. Students should not be driven toward surface learning.
- 7) Assessment should be fair.
- 8) Assessment should be timely.
- 9) Assessment should be incremental.
- 10) Assessment should be formative.
- 11) Assessment should be efficient and manageable.

If the students study effectively and work very hard, a good assessment system should allow them, who are regarded as being capable of undertaking their course, to have an opportunity of success on the assessment. The procession of peer- and self-assessment is the vital part for fulfilling the subject, however, it is not necessary for the good outcome, but it is the effective way to develop the students' skill and confidence in using these method -- for both teachers and students. In our future research, we think the teacher should try to make some shy students to be full of confidence in their presentation. Each equal opportunity should be given to every student to show the degree to which they have learned intentionally. The question which is given by the teacher should be clear and easy to understand and relevant to the currently learning content, particularly for the students who are from different cultural backgrounds and learn English as the second language. We should make sure that the vocabulary used in assessment items can be universally understood. We should explore the variety of situations where peer and self-assessment can be used as alternative source of assessment.

On the one hand, assessment can reflect students' outcomes from a narrow aspect, on the other hand, it can make both students and teachers pursue the comprehensive understanding, good communication and promote competency in writing (Brew 1995).

VII. CONCLUSION

Burner's (1966) states that learning is naturally an active process in which learners understand and build up new ideas and concept on the basis of their current/past knowledge. Often we are learning just from what we are doing and listening, but not with this new knowledge. Students do not like actively thinking and higher level of thinking does not take place. By Peer and self-assessment we encourage the students to do higher levels of thinking and learning and we lead them to using this new knowledge in a meaningful way. Peer and self-assessment can explicitly and effectively pursues deep learning, working with others, moving beyond dependence and independence to interdependence this criterion should be met, and students have put forwards questions about the contradictions in using assessment. A learning process of working together is to help each other, while an assessment process is to pit one person against another implicitly or explicitly. Language teaching is kind of interaction between teachers and students. Peer comments are systematically sought with respect to criteria identified either by the group or the learner with the teacher's help. Peer and self-assessment is a potential authentic tool, and it is the available assessment which can be acknowledged by the teachers. The key factor is the ability of the students' usage of this assessment and the degree of teachers' and students' acceptance.

APPENDIX

TABLE 3
STUDENTS' SELF-ASSESSMENT

Self-assessment	
Team work	10 8 6 4 2
Cooperation with Team	good <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> poor
Individual Contribution	
gathering information	a lot <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> little
presentation	a lot <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> little
clarity of speech	clear <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> unclear
visual aids	a lot <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> little
structuring the talk	a lot <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> little
Voice	
Clarity	good <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> bad
Intonation	good <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> bad
Non-verbal communication	
Eye contact	sufficient <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> too many
Gestures	sufficient <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> too many
Name:	Group: Mark:

TABLE 4
STUDENTS' PEER-ASSESSMENT

Assessing group	
Presentation Information	10 8 6 4 2
Variety	sufficient <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> too few
Handouts	
Content	relative <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> irrelevant
Blackboard	
clarity	clear <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> unclear
visual aids	
clarity	sufficient <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> too few
Content of presentation	
Vocabulary	broad <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> narrow
interesting	very <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> dull
detail	relevant <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> irrelevant
Topic Knowledge	sufficient <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> insufficient
Teamwork	
Coordination	good <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> bad
Workload	equal <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> unequal
Group:	Mark:

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Ying Li was born in Gansu, China in 1980. She received her M.A. degree in linguistics from Northwest Normal University, China in 2013. She is currently an associate professor in the School of Foreign Languages, Lanzhou University of Finance and Economics, Gansu, China. Her research interests include English language teaching, linguistics and business English. Now she is a visiting scholar, supported by China Scholarship Council, in university of Wolverhampton for 1 year.

Liping Chen was born in Yunnan, China in 1965. She received her degree of Master of Arts in Higher Education from University of Wolverhampton, Britain in 2011. She is currently an professor in the School of Foreign Languages, Yunnan Agricultural University, Kunming, China. Her research interests include English language teaching, English teaching methodology and English-Chinese translation. Now she is a visiting scholar, supported by China Scholarship Council, in university of Wolverhampton for 1 year.