In almost every training I conduct, I am asked, “It is mandatory to link the questions on my assessment to standards?” As a former elementary and middle school teacher, this question always throws me for a loop. It brings me back to an old saying a former administrator used to say to our staff at every PLC meeting – “How do we know where we are going, if we don’t know where we have been?” Data analysis at an item level has become imperative as we transition from our state standards to the Common Core, to see exactly what support pieces need to be put into place, and what we can feel confident about moving forward. It is important to have an idea of where you “want” to go, and get it down on paper. A blueprint for any assessment is essential – that is your road map to success!

The best analogy I could ever give was when I moved from Michigan to California. (Many of you already know that after teaching for a year in MI, I packed up my car for a new adventure in the Golden State and lived in San Francisco for 5 years. Not to worry though – I never became a Giants fan, so I will be happy to see them lose in the World Series!) Geography and “map skills” was always a strength for me, and I really felt like I had the background knowledge and scaffolding to figure out how to get my car from Macomb, MI, to San Ramon, CA. All I had to do was drive west, right? I knew that CA was that giant state on the west coast, where all the famous people lived, earthquakes were frequent, and it’s always sunny. What else was necessary to know?

Well, for one, since I had never been farther west than Chicago, I had no idea that I-94 was not the road I was going to take to get all the way to CA. (For future reference, you need to take I-80, and bring some change, it’s a toll road.) Secondly, even though Iowa and Nebraska seem like states you can just zoom through since the land is so flat, following the indicated speed limits can save you a lot of time and additional money. (Also for future reference, it is illegal to have a license plate frame on your car in Iowa – thank you for your advertising, Vyletel Volkswagen!) Next, having a fear of falling off a cliff, and having semi-truck runoffs on the side of the mountain in case you cannot break makes it difficult to drive that said VW crammed full of your life’s belongings through Montana. Not to mention the nosebleeds that will occur due to the elevation changes and dry air. It would have also been a good idea to map out some good places to stop and rest, so you aren’t stuck eating fast food three times a day and staying at motels infested with rats. Do we all see where I am going with this analogy? If I had just taken a little bit of time to really plan my trip – my outcome could have been vastly different. I would have known exactly what roads to take, be well equipped with some change in hand, known how fast I should be going to set my car on cruise, ate at nice restaurants, stopped to admire scenery or historic places, stayed at highly rated hotels with lack of vermin, have an understanding of the different biomes and changes with atmospheric pressure across our beautiful nation.....and that the all famous people live in SOUTHERN CA, where it never rains, as opposed to San Francisco, where it is always foggy and 65 degrees.

For me, it was OK to learn as I went, but for our students, we really need to map out how to make them the most successful. By planning that initial blueprint for our assessment, and linking all of our questions to standards, we are equipping ourselves to fulfill our goals, and for truly understanding our students’ needs. Back to my CA story for a moment – I was awarded the “Bay Area Teacher of the Month Award” in May of 2007. With an ego to match the size of the state, I really did not think I could do much better in terms of my career. I soon learned what it felt to have that ego deflated the following September, when I gave my 5th grade English classes what I considered to be an “easy” assessment. CA Vocabulary and Concept Development, Standard 1.3: Understand and explain frequently used synonyms and antonyms. Ok, we discussed this in class, ONCE, but who doesn’t know
the difference between a synonym and antonym by the time they get to 5th grade? I placed a question on my assessment. Here is the actual question and the item results:

**16. Which of the following words is a synonym of “add”?**

A. sum  
B. subtract  
C. ad  
D. difference

**Of the 41 students that took this assessment:**

A. 5  
B. 23  
C. 9  
D. 4

**My reaction:**

What did I learn from this item analysis? Well, for one, I think the ego needed to take a hit. Then, I needed to really analyze my students thinking. 23 of them picked Answer Choice, B. By looking at this already, I could tell that my students were confusing a synonym with an antonym. But then, it got even more interesting… 9 of them picked, C! “Add” and “ad” are homonyms – so I could see the issue there. And finally, 4 picked, D. Why? Because even though they thought a synonym was an antonym, they knew that the word “subtract” should be replaced by the word “difference” by the time they were in 5th grade. (At least they remembered me teaching them that! 😊) Point being, I needed this item analysis to reflect on the standard, on what they knew or didn’t know, and my teaching. These pieces of data analysis are the essence of why we do it – to see exactly where our students need to go, by figuring out where they have been. I hope that by sharing this with all of you, it may become a bit easier when that question arises – and why it IS necessary to take the additional 5 minutes to link questions to standards.

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**MI DataDirector Website**

As a reminder, please refer to the MI DataDirector Website for help documents and video tutorials uploaded by our amazing customers! [http://datadirectormi.webs.com/](http://datadirectormi.webs.com/)

We are the only state to have a website dedicated just for the use of our customers – so please take advantage of this awesome resource – and feel free to share your training / help documents as well!

Once you find yourself on our landing page, you will find an area on the right hand side of the page with a link to Sign Up. After you have created a Username and a Password, and answered a few questions, you are all set to begin uploading and viewing the documents and videos.

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**Spotlight on… 😊**

**Raymond David Gregory, the newest member of my family!**

Sorry, have to brag….here is my pride and joy!

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**Help Me, Help You!**

I am looking for suggestions for future topics in Emily Redman’s Recommendations. What questions are you frequently asked? What would be beneficial to you and the locals you serve? **Please email me with ideas!** Thank you in advance!