This reflection paper focuses on Dr. Ertmer`s and Dr. Watson`s speech on how to shape one`s research agenda. The talk was full of insights ranging from how to choose a research topic at the very beginning to narrowing it down thus making it researchable. All these are reflected upon in the remainder of the present paper with a specific focus on how these led to further insights for the author.

First of all, choosing a research topic that is manageable is really a challenging thing to do for graduate students including the author. The starting point of the presenters was choosing something in which we are interested. This is important in the sense that it may promote motivation which would in turn instigate perseverance to a large extent. However, this was also the point where the speakers came up with different warnings regarding determining a topic that is of interest to us. The first one of these was thinking about what kinds of evidence we would need to while pursuing our research interest. These ranged from experimental research to articles and books etc. This implied to me that even though it is favorable to research something that is interesting to us, it is also important to think about “feasibility or practicality” of it in terms of resources available including time and what kind of evidence we need. The second one was where to find the evidence we need. This closely ties back to resources in that evidence we need exists in resources be them online or soft available to us.

Moreover, it was suggested that even though we may have a general topic at the beginning we need to narrow it down so that we can deal with it within the constraints we have like time, funding etc. The first strategy suggested was to question the general topic until coming up with specific research questions we want to answer. The second, bigger suggestion was to search through existing literature and examine as many studies as possible that have been conducted on our research interest. There were some very useful, practical, specific strategies mentioned here as well: search using key words or common words used, search through references, go to conferences to build contact with others working on similar stuff, and email people whom you know are already working on something related to your research interest.

The speakers did not just talk but also enroll us in an activity too: Based on a piece of paper, we need to determine our topic, then provided our reason to study it, and share our rationale of why we are studying it. This was really an insightful activity in that I had the chance to question what I am already interested in and especially why I am studying it and should study it in the future. This brief brainstorming was also helpful to see some other reasons for why I should study my research interest further. This is because I had not done it before: Writing down my topic, the reason for studying it and the final rationale and seeing them was kind of challenging. This really made me question my research interest in terms of possible benefits.

One of the speakers mentioned how he created his own research agenda from the beginning to the end as well. This was really very helpful since it was a real-life example and it reflected what we, graduate students, have been going through. It was interesting to see how his research interests grew out of his life experiences including high school years and evolved into their final forms. The suggestions made during this process are helpful in that they provided further insights into what we need to do and how we can shape our own research agenda. Some of these are as follows: 1) start with something you are interested in, 2) take out unnecessary things, 3) keep developing your ideas by adding new stuff, 4) look for the interactions among your research ideas, 5) focus on what you are interested but do not forget about some other things that may be of utmost importance for your position, career etc. The presenter, then, showed us the graphic his own research agenda with an overarching theme consisting of secondary themes and how they relate to each other. Interestingly, it was also mentioned in the talk that for future job interviews for faculty positions, universities may ask us to create such visuals to express our research agenda. Needless to say, this was also a very helpful hint for the future, which made a lot of sense to me.

In sum, the talk on how to choose research topics and how to create one`s own research agenda provided me with a lot insights into how I can narrow down my research interest and how I can develop it with further insights. Even putting research ideas on a piece of paper and reflecting on them was very helpful since it made all of them more concrete in my mind. This way it was also helpful to think about new insights or additional ideas that I would add to my own research agenda with a specific focus in gaps exiting in the literature.