I started work at Deakin in 1978, not long after my thirty-second birthday. Deakin itself had been founded three years earlier. I had been appointed as a Senior Lecturer, tenured from Day One, to establish curriculum research in the new University. Our Faculty of Education was to be good at three things: Psychology (the Psychology group was in the Faculty of Education at Deakin), Educational Administration, and Curriculum. (Later we turned out to be good at other things too.) Our Foundation Dean of Education, Professor Iain Wallace, led the Psychology group. Richard Bates was appointed to lead the Educational Administration group, soon after assisted by John Smyth. For some time, I was the only new appointee in Curriculum.

The University had been formed out of some parts of the Gordon Institute of Technical and Further Education in Geelong, together with many staff of the Geelong Teachers’ College—a primary teacher education college which was a creature of the State of Victoria. Deakin was new and forging a new identity. Its Foundation Vice Chancellor Fred Jevons had determined that it would be the Open University of Australia, modelled on the British Open University.

Our Dean, Iain Wallace, was a shrewd and capable Scot. He knew it would take careful management to develop research at the new institution. Few of the existing staff brought over from the Teachers’ College had doctorates or much research experience. Some were longstanding staff with few aspirations to be researchers—their identities were as teachers’ college lecturers—but there was a body of ‘young Turks’ (I will call them) who were about my age—a surprising number of them born between about 1943 and 1950 (I was born in 1946). So Iain Wallace brought in the new research leaders in the belief that they were promising young academics, rather than established leaders in their fields, who would lead by example. I can’t speak for Richard Bates (a few years older than me), but I had no leadership experience at all that I had noticed. Perhaps others believed I was a leader; I thought only that I could be responsible for myself, and work collaboratively with others willing to do the same thing.

I had been an undergraduate student at the University of Sydney, and was appointed as a tutor when I finished my Honours degree. I had the good fortune to be working on test anxiety, and thus to be working in a small group with Ken Sinclair (one of my teachers in Educational Psychology) and Terry Heys (an ex-teacher doing a doctorate in Education at Sydney) on the theory of test anxiety.
immensely enjoyed the intellectual challenge of working in a research group—and have enjoyed working in teams ever since.

That collaborative research experience at the University of Sydney continued through my (1972–76) doctoral studies at the University of Illinois where I worked in the Center for Instructional Research and Curriculum Evaluation (CIRCE) founded by Tom Hastings. The CIRCE staff included Bob Stake, Arden Grotelueschen, Ernie House, Gordon Hoke and many others; the graduate students were an outstanding group of young scholars. Our sack lunches (sometimes eccentric, as when Bob had us read Ibsen plays) were lively discussions, and grad students formed groups in courses and around research projects, sharing their ideas and experiences.

That intellectual climate of collaboration and mutual development continued when, starting in 1975, I went to work at the Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE) at the University of East Anglia (UEA) in Norwich, England. I worked on the ‘Understanding Computer Assisted Learning’ (UNCAL) evaluation of the National Development Programme in Computer Assisted Learning, principally working with Barry MacDonald, David Jenkins and David Tawney. (I started my Senior Research Associate job with the UNCAL team before my doctorate was complete.) Lawrence Stenhouse was the Director of CARE, very well known for the Humanities Curriculum project that he directed—which has also involved Jean Rudduck, John Elliott, Barry MacDonald and Helen Simons, among others. During my time at CARE, John Elliott and Clem Adelman were leading one of the most important action research projects in education, the Ford Teaching Project. Apart from our substantive work evaluating computer assisted learning projects, the UNCAL team were also leading the development of ‘democratic evaluation’ (Barry MacDonald’s work on the politics of evaluation had drawn me to CARE) and championing the use of case study approaches in evaluation. It was a heady time to be there.

I had come back to Australia in early 1978 and worked for a time as a freelance evaluation consultant to the Australian Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) in Canberra, directed by Malcolm Skilbeck. Through this association, I had met and worked intensively with many people involved in Australian curriculum development projects and educational evaluation efforts. These connections turned out to be very significant when I started at Deakin in October 1978. Various CDC people, like Annette Greenall, now Annette Greenall Gough, asked me to work with them on evaluations of curriculum development projects they were managing when I went to Deakin. Invariably, I said I would, but only on condition that I could work on the project with a Deakin colleague (with Ian Robottom, for example, in the case of Annette Greenall’s environmental education projects).

So—I arrived at Deakin with no experience of formal leadership, and with a clear expectation that I would establish a research group. It seemed a bit daunting, but not impossible on the face of it. Happily, an old friend from the University of Sydney, Mavis Kelly, was working as an Instructional Designer in Education at