The events of the past couple of months have prompted me to reflect on what it means to be a leader, a member of a community and the role for teachers and education.

Like Jill Wilson, I sat glued to my television set in January to absorb and be part of history with the inauguration of Barak Obama as President of the United States. My niece was in the USA just before this event and I asked her to get me a t-shirt as a tangible item to link me to this event. I reflected on what was it that compelled such a wide and deep interest, from the streets of Kenya to the streets of Washington on this day. The capacity of telecommunications to transmit instantaneously into many countries and places was a notable feature of this event. It powerfully illustrated global interconnectivity with real time coverage of an important and worthy event, which is now quite commonplace for all peoples in the world. I realised that it was hope that lead to the widespread following that the inauguration created. It is hope that the world will be a better place for generations to come. In this edition of Ethos Barak Obama’s Inauguration speech is reprinted to illustrate his world view and his leadership. I wonder in 2017, eight years on, what he will be remembered for. Will it be his monetary policy which meant that the USA recovered from the current economic downturn; will it be the translation of energy policy to sustainable alternatives; or to build an education system not based on test scores but based on research into teaching and education? Strong pressure is placed on this leader as he grapples with the complexities and difficulties of leadership.

The second event that glued me to television and more importantly radio was the bushfires in Victoria. Like Barak Obama’s inauguration, this event was followed across the world. This event of last month is incomprehensible in terms of devastation and loss on numerous levels, and signals that we are living in ‘new times’. Whether this is ascribed to climate change or other forces of nature, it is a reality that the climate is a force of nature and does not discriminate in its power and influence. Alongside this devastating natural disaster springs hope from the stories and actions of individual people, too numerous to name and perhaps only known to a few. The sense of community spirit, generosity and human nature has overflowed to all those affected. In eight years time, perhaps it will be small acts of kindness, generosity and anonymity that will be one of the legacies of this event.

In this edition of Ethos are two units on leadership in the Australian context through a focus on Prime Ministers and what achievements were part of their term in office. It is interesting that what is regarded as an achievement in one historical period may be regarded as a challenge in another period of history. As leadership is one of the areas to study in the VCE International Politics, the inclusion of Obama’s speech and the unit of work from Barry Jones’s presentation at the December conference, offer to teachers some resources for this study.

The 21st century challenges to build a teaching profession responsive to the skills, knowledge and attributes required for students are real. In the 21st Century schooling article, Anne Shaw reports on her research into schools and what she describes as 21st century teaching and learning. In Australia, a new curriculum policy the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, sets the direction for Australian schooling for the next 10 years. In this statement, the agenda for schools and education states the importance of civics and citizenship, the major changes in the world, the role of globalisation and the increasing influence of the Asia Pacific region. For Social Educators, this means a clear mandate to provide leadership to a school community on this document and its importance in the curriculum.

Support for VCE Sociology teachers is provided through an article from Pam Wallace on work and life pressures in challenging times. This article explains some of the changing contexts for work and family life, women and work, and some of the challenges for the future. Also included is the SEV partners, reviews and resources. I hope you enjoy this edition of Ethos and you find it worthwhile and supportive for your teaching and learning in Social Education.