About the Speaker:
Florence McCarthy has extensive experience in educational and social development issues and programs and is currently engaged in research focusing on educational issues for refugee students both in Australia and other parts of the world. She has considerable professional experience as a researcher, teacher, consultant, and policy adviser in the areas of development studies, gender, service-learning, and education. She has taught at Cornell University and Teachers College, Columbia. She has also served for many years as Professor and Special Adviser in Service Learning at the International Christian University, Tokyo, Japan. She has been involved in international service-learning in the US since 1989, and since 2001 has been instrumental in the development of service-learning in tertiary institutions across Asia and Australia. She is currently an Adjunct Associate Professor of the Centre for Educational Research at the University of Western Sydney, Australia.

Abstract:
We live in precarious times. As globalisation and neoliberal philosophies create ever more unequal economic realities, the consequences are felt in all societies around the world. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the realm of education. In addition to its usual role as a key to employment and economic betterment, education can also be a force for ameliorating conditions of conflict and modifying discriminatory practices among diverse populations. As the contrast between these two philosophical positions suggests, tensions may easily arise around the purposes of education. Policies generated by conservative governments may pressure some institutions to focus primarily on learning for employment. Financial constraints may leave these institutions with little choice in this regard. Other institutions, responding to social needs and tensions in both local and global environments, may aim as well to focus on social justice, human rights, and peace studies.

This address will explore lessons learned in the establishment of service learning programs in institutions of higher education in Asia and Australia in the new century. These lessons exemplify how service learning has functioned as a vehicle for constructing patterns of interaction that have enabled students from quite different Asian societies to create new understandings and appreciations of those who are unlike themselves. Service learning programs have enabled students to challenge their own subjectivities about who they are and their views of others and of other societies. By helping young people shape more open and encompassing approaches to the world, these programs have provided important steps towards peace building and reconciliation.

As we move into the future, service learning as an educational program will most likely be expected meet the demands of its supporting institutions as well as responding to critical issues in the social environment. The versatility of service learning is clear: it can be a vehicle for preparation for employment, as well as enabling students to develop new understandings and more nuanced knowledges about people who are different. As higher education institutions are increasingly required to straddle this divide, service learning programs will be called upon to weigh up the balance between these two philosophical positions and where possible, incorporate both.