The Active Subjects of Welfare Reform: a Street-Level Comparison of Employment Services in Australia and Denmark

Greg Marston, *Jørgen Elm Larsen and Catherine McDonald,* *The University of Queensland, School of Social Work and Applied Human Sciences Australia; University of Copenhagen, Department of Sociology, Denmark; The University of Queensland, School of Social Work and Applied Human Sciences, Australia*

1   Introduction

Since the publication of Esping-Andersen's (1990) seminal work on comparative welfare states, conventional comparative policy analysis has distinguished between the 'social democratic', 'corporatist' and 'liberal' welfare states. More recently, welfare reform developments in the mature (and essentially western) welfare states are driving national welfare-states along an altered trajectory. Some policy scholars, for example, are suggesting that an unprecedented degree of neo-liberal convergence is occurring across all welfare state types, particularly in terms of the commodification of welfare provision through strengthening the relationship between individuals and the labour market (Gilbert 2002; Handler 2003). This paper seeks to examine the welfare state convergence thesis in the context of activation policies in Denmark and Australia.

On the face of it, these two countries could not be more dissimilar in that one has developed a social democratic (Nordic) welfare state, while the other, a distinctive (Anglo) liberal welfare state, albeit with some weak forms of universalism. Indeed, it is the degree of institutional differences that makes a comparative study of Denmark and Australia so interesting at this juncture. We are presented with an opportunity to explore dimensions of convergence within the contemporary politics and discourses of welfare state restructuring. Here, we show how two countries, notable for their welfare state differences, have appropriated and interpreted a set of policy prescriptions based on the OECD's 'active society' thesis. During the past decade, most OECD welfare states have adopted some kind of activation measures in their overall unemployment policies (Castles 2004). Promoted by the OECD, the new active line in social policy has been introduced under different names in different welfare states. Activation measures have become of prime importance in reforming welfare systems and in stimulating or forcing labour market participation of unemployed and other social benefit claimants (Oorschot 1999; van Berkel and Møller 2002).

Our specific focus is on case management practices as a key strategy for implementing activation policies in both Australia and Denmark. Denmark retains its commitment to a modernist and progressive welfare state (see Greve 2004). Among the OECD countries, Denmark has a very equal income distribution, and in the 1990s, had the second lowest share of incomes below the 50 per cent of the median income threshold (Finansministeriet 2004). Australia on the other hand, has largely abandoned any strategy of equitable redistribution and has pursued an aggressive program of decoupling government policy from the creation of

social citizenship and re-coupling citizenship status to the requirements of the labour market (Jamrozik 2001).

We argue that case management is particularly illuminating in exploring the extent of convergence resulting from the implementation of activation policies in these two countries. Case management is a human service intervention that has been made ubiquitous by the spread of welfare-to-work initiatives. We are interested to explore whether or not the actual social practices of case management in the delivery of employment services draws its operational rationalities from the politics of neo-liberalism, or whether the specific socio-historical context of each welfare state has a moderating effect on policy practices.

In the context of employment services case management is designed to shape the dispositions, attributes and aspirations of unemployed people. Case management is classic street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky 1980), in that the outcomes of policy are determined within a discretionary relationship. Further, street level implementation is often a context of policy practice removed from the public view. In studies of the effects of activation policy this relationship remains somewhat of a 'black box', obscured by the attention given to outputs and outcomes in the policy evaluation literature. Examining the social relations of unemployment within this opaque space is useful in understanding both the intended and unintended outcomes of activation policies. Before demonstrating this process by reference to empirical data, we first want to briefly articulate the generally accepted differences and similarities between the welfare states of Denmark and Australia.

2   Differences and Similarities – Denmark and Australia

Denmark and Australia represent very different types of welfare states. Denmark is one of the Nordic social democratic welfare states. As such, it developed a highly de-commodified welfare state with a universalistic approach to social policy, based on a commitment by the state to maximise the social citizenship rights of its people. Denmark exhibits a high degree of reliance on comparatively generous public welfare, high levels of total employment, high female participation rates in the labour market, high levels of taxation, generous social benefits, and low degree of wage differentiation and income inequality.

Nevertheless, in recent times, there has been a noticeable trend away from the universality of the Danish welfare model. In comparative terms, Denmark still exhibits a high degree of universalism. However, changes in pension arrangements and in health care, for example, have lead to a situation in which social divisions between those who can (as a result of policy) supplement state-provided benefits and services have increased. Overall though, the developments are not considered to be so dramatic as to fundamentally alter the structures of and commitment to a social democratic state (Greve 2004; Scharpf 2000).

Weighing all the empirical evidence on policy changes during the last two decades, Kautto and Kvist (2002: 14) reach the conclusion that "Denmark had moved closer to the ideal type of the Nordic welfare model over the last 20 years". Accordingly, it seems that Europeanisation and globalisation have not rendered the Nordic welfare model unsustainable or even particularly unstable. Indeed, in the area of employment policy it is rather the opposite. During the 1990s a so-called "job miracle" was created in the Danish labour market and unemployment fell from 12 per cent in 1993 to 5 per cent in 2002. One important explanation of this is that the Danish Model combines a high degree of flexibility with a generous security net and an active labour market policy (Madsen and Pedersen 2003).

Denmark is often singled out for emphasising the improvement of the labour market performance of the unemployed by developing their human capital, rather than forcing, disciplining and punishing unemployed into work (Torfing 1999).

This is not the case in Australia. Unlike Denmark, Australia has always had a highly commodified welfare state that privileges targeted means tested social assistance as the main platform of social security. The overall preference of the Australian welfare system is to encourage people to be 'self-reliant' - a preference supported by a range of policy devices. Further, the Australian regime has long been one which differentiates between different types or categories of citizens. Over the past thirty years, this tendency has become even more marked, as publicly supported welfare has become more residualised (and stigmatised), and a range of policy tools have been implemented to encourage self-provision by those who are able.

In 1996, Australian social security reforms replaced the notion of 'reciprocal obligation 'with 'mutual obligation'. This change meant that the receiving of income support became subject to an obligation requirement in the form of 'active job-seeking behaviour', which could include training, voluntary work or part-time work. In practice, however, the opportunity and the sanction approach are often combined using both the carrots and the sticks in making unemployed people work (Kosonen 1998). The shift to a more demanding form of 'obligation' from the unemployed reflects Australia's unilateral adoption of the critique of 'passive' income support systems, and the acceptance of the 'active society' concept being pursued by the OECD.

In sum, 'active society' based reforms have increased the requirements placed on the unemployed, introduced harsher penalties for failure to meet them, and placed a greater emphasis on compliance (Bigby and Files 2003: 278). Unlike Denmark, Australia's employment services policy is less interested in sustained development of human capital, but is more interested in promoting work readiness in as short a period as possible. In other words, Australia's recent policy trajectory in employment services represents an intensification of its residual welfare state tendencies. Coupled with these developments, the major foundation of redistribution - centralised wage fixing - has been systematically dismantled. This in turn, and accompanied by a program of neo-classical macro and micro-economic policies, has lead to a liberalised economy, the entrenchment of long-term unemployment, a more commodified and segmented labour market, and escalating increases in wage inequalities.

While Australia and Denmark are clearly different in many respects, particularly in their means of providing welfare, there nevertheless appears to be a degree of convergence taking place. This 'convergence', we argue, is manifest in employment policy discourse and associated employment-related services for the unemployed. Demand side policies have been downplayed as a means of combating unemployment, focusing instead on supply side strategies. Accordingly, both countries are now using the human service intervention of case management as the principle method of acting on the problem of long-term unemployment.

3 Unemployment as a problem of government

To examine the social relations of unemployment and activation policies in these two countries we employ an analytical framework drawn from the governmentality literature. A governmental approach seeks to understand policy as a regime of social practices that draws

on various technologies (for example, case management), and also on political rationalities (such as neo-liberalism). In this orientation, the practice of government entails attempts to shape aspects of human behaviour according to particular sets of norms and towards specific ends, such as an 'active society'. As Dean (1999: 10) explains:

"Government is any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape conduct by working through our desires, aspirations and interests and beliefs, for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes."

Our reasoning in using this conceptualisation of government is that as a mode of inquiry it is acutely attuned to illuminating how social identities are offered, taken up or rejected (or otherwise constituted) in everyday practices such as the delivery of case management. It is an orientation that encourages us to focus on the actual practices involved in the implementation of active employment policy.

Applied to employment services, such an approach asks 'how is it that the unemployed and their case managers both govern and are governed within this policy environment?' What processes, procedures, practices and measures are employed to promote the conduct of conduct? An analytics of governmentality suggests we attend to how case management promotes self-government; producing the various ways and means by which participants are transformed and transform themselves. In one sense, the interactions between the case manager and the person receiving assistance are commonsensical - a 'mundane discourse' (Watson 2000: 70). The point of examining these everyday practices is to get a more precise picture of how the activation enterprise occurs and through what means.

The research approach is based on the core premise that contemporary forms of governing the unemployed are about governing with the unemployed, through enlisting their agency to reform behavior, attitudes and practices (Walters 2000; Dean 1999). Dean (1999) nominates types of processes (called technologies of government) designed to promote particular forms of subjectivity. One key group of these are technologies of agency; those processes or techniques designed to both deploy and shape possibilities for freedom and autonomy. In the case of employment services, one function of case management is to produce the desired or ethical citizen of advanced neo-liberalism. This is a subject that is capable of exercising choice and responsibility within a marketised policy environment (Dean, 1999). In thise sense, case managers are the 'petty engineers' of advanced liberal governments (Rose, 1999a, p. 92) relying on various forms of psychological expertise and authority to manage and shape the behaviour of the unemployed towards particular ends.

Halvorsen (1998) argues that the discourse of self-reliance is everywhere; it has become a key-word in the new active labour market and social policy. The active citizen is supposed to be capable of self-government and capable of managing a range of social and economic risks. At the same it is important to note that the constitution of the 'active citizen' is shaped differently in different welfare states, according to national history, cultural orientation, social values and specific configuration of rights and obligations. Examining micro interactions within these macro social and policy contexts reveals how the discourse of activation has been differentially appropriated in both Denmark and Australia.

4   The empirical studies

In discussing the process of 'activation' we draw on two studies, both undertaken in the service delivery context of employment services. The Danish study took place in Kongens Enghave, a city district in Copenhagen with many long-term unemployed social assistance claimants. In the Danish study, 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted from September 1999 to May 2000 with clients, the director and employees at the Department of Employment, job consultants at the "Green House" (the center for introduction and distribution of client's to the different activation projects), projects leaders and employees at the activation projects and finally the leader of the non-profit organization "Sydhavns Kompagniet" that took care of the main part of "social activation".

The Australian study involved providers in what is known as the Job Network – a network of commercial and non-profit agencies providing employment services to the unemployed on behalf of the state. Job Network agencies undertake case management, through which a number of different people-processing interventions and activities can occur, similar to the Danish 'activation' process. The Job Network agencies selected for the study included a large national non-profit provider with multiple service sites, a small non-profit provider with multiple sites and a small for-profit provider, also with multiple sites. This range of providers reflects the broader constitution of the different organizational forms (both in terms of auspice and size) represented in the Job Network. In the Australian case, 12 interviews were conducted with unemployed people and 12 with case managers in 2002.

We acknowledge that the samples are relatively small and more systematic research needs to be conducted to draw any firm conclusions about the differences between the two countries. However, our principle aim is to understand the ambiguities and tensions of policy implementation in two different welfare states which appear to be adopting a similar policy discourse. There is an important analytical task involved in determining whether universalising policy discourse changes the life-world discourse and actions of actors in specific sites that are the targets of such discourse. Micro-analysis of governance change needs to identify how much of the change within human service organisations is (1) merely ripples on the surface of a settled modality of governance, (2) shifting parameters of established discourses and practice relations, and (3) unsettling the whole culture of governance relations (Healey et al. 2003: 67).

We need to find a way to connect the reflexive capacity of human agents to negotiate the discursive spaces that invite policy actors and human service practitioners to "…take up the neo-liberally induced surveillance that holds us neatly packaged within economic and utilitarian discourses" (Davies 2005: 7). In other words, we need to be attune to the implications of the neo-liberal project for both the unemployed-subjects and the professional-subjects of the welfare state. It is for this reason that we drawn on both interview data with professional subjects and clients of employment services. In the next section, we begin with the forms and modes of authority deployed by case managers in these local sites (conduct of others); followed by an analysis of the operations of technologies of agency employed by the unemployed themselves (conduct of self).

5   Power and authority embedded in case management

Rose (1999: 49) notes that in advanced liberal democracies, the instrumentalities of the state govern from a distance, in that domains outside of the central agencies of government authorities are shaped by it to engage in the business of government. It does this by

"authorizing the authority" of local social actors, such as case managers. In this mode of governance power and authority are dispersed, rather than concentrated in constitutional forms of government. In activating citizens at the local level of policy practice three modes of governmental authority were evident in the empirical studies, each of which was nested within different variants of psychological knowledge. Within a psychological discourse, the primary mode of authority employed was what we have called empathetic authority. This was surrounded by pedagogic forms, which, in turn, were encapsulated within a fallback framework of coercive authority.

Each of these modes of authority can be invoked depending on whether the unemployed person is interpreted as fitting the criteria of the 'good jobseeker' or the 'passive job seeker'. Empathetic and pedagogical modes of authority are ways by which the unemployed subject comes to know themselves (techniques of subjectification) through the professional gaze of the case managers. Here, the subjected individuals begin to adopt the discourse and so they become not passive objects, but active subjects of the employment services discourse Consequently, rather than focusing solely on the coercive dimensions of the activation regime, the essential element to this mode of governance is that the 'targets' are primarily positioned as being in charge of their own governance (Rogers 2004: 96). It is for this reason that empathetic and pedagogical authority are presented by case managers as the preferred means of constituting the active subjects of 'welfare-to-work' programs.

5.1   Empathetic authority

A primary reason for using empathetic authority in Australian employment services is to 'motivate people', as the following excerpt from an Australian case manager illustrates:

"How we talk, how we approach somebody, our gestures and things like that, that's just a natural part of us. Our naturalness is actually one of the most important things. I think a lot of people have never had anyone to believe in them…I found that even the ones that have been skeptical about it, as soon as I kind of say, 'I trust that you want to work and that you are doing the best that you can', it's amazing the result that happened. They hear the great things that are being said about them, some of it may not yet be true, but it's what we hope will be true of that person, like, 'They're punctual, they're enthusiastic, they're motivated', and you see them start to sit up higher in their chair and feel really good when they leave for that interview."

In this description we get a sense that the good jobseeker is highly organised, responsible and emotionally upbeat. In the Danish case, the same empathetic impulse was most clearly manifest in the case manager's desire to work on other presenting issues. Here however, the informant illustrates how Danish case managers interpret their brief more broadly than the delivery of employment-related services. One of the project managers says:

"How am I supposed to activate people who are running around in the streets without a home – I can't. I have people here that are sleeping in the streets, but I do not dare to have them sleeping here, I'd get sacked if something goes wrong, but I need to give them a temporary place to stay – or to do something for them."

Accordingly, the Danish case managers established a range of services strictly outside of the activation agenda, for example, a support group for young, unemployed fathers who have been divorced, and a kitchen for the unemployed to cook their own meals. One of the case managers involved in these initiatives said:

"We try to do different kinds of things so that they will be able to handle their own situation, not everything is about work/activation. I don't care if they work or not. For me it is about progress in their lives, that they will be able to take care of them selves, this is the meaning of it for me."

In Denmark, it was clear that the case managers felt able to engage in a manner that did not reduce the unemployed person to a purely economic actor. The unemployed subject was situated within a social context of need and self-care. As suggested, this mode of operation was less evident in Australia where the activation regime and role of Job Network case managers was more narrowly defined. Nevertheless, parallel stories were found in the Danish and Australian studies. In the Danish study, one case manager said:

"We have some people here with lot of energy and who are clever enough and physically fit and in that sense ought to be in the labour market, but they have a hostile attitude, so no employer will buy them. They have a bad attitude, they cannot get rid of it and they are unable to sell them selves. We have a client with an enormously aggressive attitude. It simply shines out of him – through all his pores…So I said to him: 'What is wrong with you is that you are too damned tough. You are simply too tough, you are too aggressive. You must try to be a little softer, a little nicer".

In the Australian study, one case manager illustrated a common strategy, the transformation of anger into a psychological problem on which she could act. In the following except she discusses this, and in doing so, illustrates the use of psychological authority and therapy:

"I have had half a dozen or so of them that would come at me, yelling, screaming all that sort of stuff and you know, it takes some time but you can eventually talk them down. I had a fellow last week, he came in and he was huffing and puffing around up at the front and then I got him down to my desk and I sat down and talked to him and we talked about a few things. He eventually said to me 'I'm not well'. I said 'Why aren't you well?' And he said 'Oh, I've got problems you know I go to the Doctors'. So I talked. A lot of the people who come to me have alcohol and drug addictions and mental illness. They seem to be quite free to tell me all about it."

This case manager demonstrates the desirable response on the part of the angry client to her use of psychological authority, the transformation of anger into another more manageable emotional state. It also illustrates the power of confession in case management as a key interpersonal technology in transforming and 'freeing' the self from self-defeating thoughts and practices. Case management practices often involve forms of disclosure, a process described by one Australian case manager as "an onion, peeling back the various layers until you get to the core", or in other words the 'real problem'. In these descriptions we get a sense of how the social problem of unemployment comes to be transformed into a psychological state, where the problem and its potential solution are located with the unemployed person.

While both case studies evidenced the use of empathetic authority, in the Danish case it was promoted within a more holistic interpretation of the person and his or her presenting situation. In contrast, in the Australian sample of case managers the common theme was to understand drug and alcohol problems, panic attacks and other anxieties as hindrances to labour market participation. In part this reflects a division of labour between case managers in

the Job Network and the role played by the government's Personal Support Program where non-vocational barriers (including substance abuse, mental health problems) can be addressed. In the case of Denmark both roles are incorporated into the single case management role. Related to the process of governing with the unemployed subject towards the realization of the 'active self' is the use of pedagogic authority.

5.2   Pedagogic authority

Evident in both the Australian and Danish studies was the use of pedagogic authority. In these instances, the unemployed people were uniformly represented as having some type of character deficit that could be remedied through moral instruction. The need to learn time management and punctuality, for example, was regularly discussed in Denmark. The unemployed themselves entered into the project of learning, as this comment attests:

"I learn a lot of things every day. Learn to handle stressful situations and learn to speak out. You learn a lot about yourself. You discover facets of yourself that you were not aware of. At least I have, I have learnt a lot during the last 5 months here."

Interestingly, this person went on to demonstrate that her positive engagement with this type of authority made the process feel qualitatively different from coercive 'activation' processes.

A common perception among case managers in both countries is that many unemployed people need to acquire what are termed "soft qualifications". From Denmark:

"… how to conduct your self on the labour market, how to behave at a work place, when you should meet in the morning and leave in the afternoon and how to interact with others at the work place."

"… to be service minded, not to talk all day in the phone with relatives and friends… being hygienic and conduct your self in relation to cooperation and teambuilding… It is about socialising processes and personal development to change those things, it takes a long time."

Again, for Danish case managers the goal of activation was not necessarily work (as it was for the Australians), but was underpinned by more traditional ideas about appropriate socialisation:

"Teaching people to get up in the morning, teaching them to be part of a community, to have some social contact…It is difficult to say if it is a work project or a social pedagogical project, among the staff we can not agree upon that, but it is both the one and the other in my opinion".

 "We have to teach them to take responsibility, in relation to socialising with others, to be considerate towards each other and be able to work together… you see, one takes their own coffee mug and put it in the sink, but never the others… and they never voluntarily wash the mugs – they care for themselves but not for others, that's what we have to teach them…. So we, are as far as is possible, trying to teach them to take responsibility and to act on their own initiative."

Nevertheless, whatever the intent, the use of pedagogic authority tends to position the unemployed person as almost childlike, requiring paternalistic intervention. Richard Sennett's

(2003) work on welfare reform in the United States suggests that one of the consequences of contemporary workfare policies is a loss of respect, which is brought about through infantilising the welfare subject as a non-citizen. In this state, the subject can be legitimately governed in the interests of becoming a worker-citizen. In one instance, for example, an Australian case manager recalled that she was required to 'teach' basic hygiene:

"Sometimes I have to say 'You're not presented very well, you know. You smell' - which a lot of clients do. Yeah. We've got a hygiene pack that we give them. It's got your soap, your washing detergent in there, shampoo, shavers, all that type of stuff that we give those clients."

While most Danish and Australian clients accepted the use of pedagogic authority, there were examples from the interview sample where the infantilizing tendencies of pedagogic modes of authority were explicitly contested and problematised. For example, from Australia:

"It's speaking down to people. Like children".

And from Denmark:

"They don't talk (up) to us, but down to us. They don't talk to us, like human beings, but down to us (points at the ground) - as if we are slaves or animals."

In these exchanges the clients are refusing to be what the state offers them in the context of contemporary welfare politics – refusing to accept authority in the interests of becoming a self-reliant 'job seeker'. These examples also highlight the importance of incorporating a politics of articulation (of subjects speaking back) into governmental analyses of the processes of subjectification. The forms of resistance and refusal are even more relevant to the discussion about the use of coercive authority, which is used when empathetic and pedagogic authority failed to 'activate' the subject.

5.3   Coercive authority
In its most obvious form, coercive authority takes the form of the activation penalty (or 'breach' notification) wherein the case manager reports a person to the authorities for some form of behavioral non-compliance, possible resulting in a financial penalty. In the Danish case "breaching" by case managers is classified into two main categories. The first category covers those who are able, but not willing to work. The other category covers those who are either not willing or able to work and those who are (perhaps) willing, but not able to work. The first category is dealt with by what is termed "open activation". The basic idea of open activation is to force people to show up at a specific place at a specific time every day where they are under surveillance. Those who do not comply loose their social assistance:

"We are talking about the hard kernel, those who are doing moonshine work or are criminals, it is those we want to catch by using open activation… It is those who park their 3x34 van (a transport company) while they are at the Social Security Office asking for social assistance."

The second category is dealt with by what is termed "social activation". It is not intentionally a coercive form of authority. It is "caring" or empathetic authority, but in some cases it takes on a coercive intent, as illustrated in the Danish case by the response to people with alcohol dependency. Clients categorized as alcoholics represent for the case managers one of the most difficult groups – and of all male clients, as many as one third are categorized as former or

active alcoholics. Coercive authority is employed towards them in that there is a 'no alcohol' policy on the projects, and if the clients do not comply with this (or if they do not show up) they can be punished by losing their financial support. However, alcoholics are also dealt with by pedagogical and empathetic authority. A job consultant describes the problem with alcoholics on the projects in this way:

"If people have an alcohol problem, if it's a big problem and influences their presence in the activation project, we sometimes say to them: 'Listen, we think you should go and see your doctor and talk to him about getting some Antabuse, and then we will give you your Antabuse twice a week.' We cannot force people to take Antabuse, but on the other hand they have an obligation to participate in activation. Sometimes we deny them their social assistance if they do not comply. But it varies enormously how hard I press them…Sometimes we make an agreement with them: 'If you are participating in this project, then you are on Antabuse, we know you can not handle it by your self and that's how its going to be'.

Unlike Denmark, Australian case managers have considerably less capacity for discretion and do not distinguish between clients when resorting to coercive authority. In other words, the policy guidelines do not allow case managers to 'use' coercive authority differentially for developmental reasons. In other words, there is less room for discretion. In the Australian sample, the most common reason to apply coercive authority was failure to attend for an initial interview after being notified by the government that they were required to participate. A case manager said, for example:

"In a lot of cases it is the only way to get some sort of a response from people. It gets their attention. Let's face it. Money is what makes the world go round."

Nearly all of the Australian case managers justified breaching in terms of undesirable characteristics ascribed to the clients:

"You've got to do it because there are some lazy ones out there without a doubt. I've probably got twenty per cent or so, on my case load."

In the Australian context, coercive authority usually got results, in that it provoked what were considered to be desirable behaviors (that is, compliance). In Denmark, coercive authority also had the desired effect, since more than half of those questioned about their motives to participate in activation answered that it was because they otherwise would lose the entitlement to social assistance. On the other hand, the possibility of being sanctioned is not the only motivation to participate in activation measures since about 30 per cent of those who mention sanctions as a motivation factor also mention positive motives to participate (Harsløf 2001). In other words: there are mixed motives to participate and many clients were quite ambivalent about their activation. This ambivalence is explored further in the next section.

6   Remaining ethical while unemployed

Rose (1999: 245) suggests that analytically, there is a three fold division in technologies of agency: moral codes which suggest the ethical self that people should aspire to; ethical scenarios wherein such ethical selves are promoted; and techniques of self, the processes by which a person acts upon themselves or conducts their own conduct. In both countries, the ethical subject (or good job seeker) has "realistic" (meaning low) expectations of types of

employment, but is asked to articulate aspirations of what he or she might yet become. For example:

"I've made a comment about people who come in with dreams rather than goals. You need to find out what really inspires somebody and it's acceptable to work towards [that as] an employment goal. You may suspect it's unrealistic, but for a short period of time, you allow the job seeker time to reality check this goal with your support."

In the Danish case it was the same; "realistic" expectations often referred to situations where the clients had to lower their expectations to a "realistic" level. In many cases there were discrepancies between what was perceived by the case managers as overly high expectations among the clients on what they would be able to achieve and the case manager's judgment of their employability. In negotiating the action plans, the case managers often 'persuaded' the clients to lower the goal and means of activation (for example participating in the local activation projects instead of starting a formal education or starting in job training in a private firm).

As indicated, the principal attribute of the ethical self, nominated by all case managers, was personal motivation. Any conduct that saps motivation is treated as an indicator of an unethical self. Being motivated also involves being a self-starter, taking responsibility and curtailing expectations of what the case manager would achieve. The ethical subject is also one who is unhappy about their dependant status, as this Australian client (and the majority of clients in both studies) illustrates:

"I feel guilty, especially when people say 'oh, you know, my money's going to pay you to sit around'. I mean you know, even though that's not technically true, you know you can't help feel bad."
Here we see how paid work is equated with self worth. The eulogisation of paid work in Australia means that the 'unproductive' elicit little pity from others and in this example punish themselves for being on the wrong side of a powerful moral binary. Moreover, what we start to see in these illustrative excerpts is how the liberal arts of government, such as those promoted in welfare-to-work programs, do not determine ethical subjectivities. Rather, case management practices elicit, promote, facilitate, and foster the attributes, capacities and qualities congruent with an ethical subject position; through deployment of the various authorities discussed previously (Rose 1998).

An Australian case manager discussed a common ethical scenario, one that motivates people as well as addresses undesirable aspects of the unemployed self:

"Every morning we have a Job Seeking Group that people are encouraged to come in and do their applications here and treat this like their own sort of office space. They get that social contact and feed off each other. It's really nice to see some of the job seekers forming relationships and start helping each other out, and looking for jobs for each other. We also have a facilitator in the room while that's happening."

Unemployed clients in both countries are expected to show how they have transformed themselves. They are offered various acceptable lifestyles, and are enjoined to engage in personal labour to "assemble a way of life (Rose 1998: 230-1). One of the key ways this occurs is through processes whereby the clients decipher themselves to themselves, providing

sets of explanations for their circumstances. One common variation of these involved older clients explaining their continued unemployment by reference to their age:

"I'm at that difficult age. I'm too young to retire, and despite what it's publicised about employment, I'm getting to a point that I'm too old to go into a full time position. I'm fifty four."

Nonetheless, the unemployed are expected to manage themselves in the face of adversity, for example, they have to keep going, and not become depressed, discouraged or angry. Describing an unsuccessful job application process where she was one of eight hundred applicants for twenty positions, one Australian woman said:

"I don't get mad about it. I just go onto the next one….I don't think it pays to whinge and rant and rave, it's just going to put people off".

In the Danish sample, the same processes were at work:

"I have been given responsibility. Even though I some times think that I would like a day off, I tell my self: 'No, there are only two people in the kitchen, I have to be there'. I have got that feeling of responsibility towards other people."

However, the effects of these technologies of agency and identity are not totalising. Resistance, as Lemke (2001) and Rose (1998) point out, is part of the processes of government. Rose (ibid: 35) argues that "human beings often find themselves resisting the forms of personhood they are enjoined to adopt". A Danish client, for example, clearly indicated his dislike of the personal intrusiveness of the case management process, in this case, in relation to his weight:
"I can hardly walk the stairs to my apartment at the 3rd floor… and everybody is telling me, it is because I am too fat. I know that… The caseworker dare not tell me. The first time I met her I said to her: 'The only thing you should not say, because I know it my self, and I do not want to hear it any more, is that I am too fat… It is my life and you shall not try to decide for me, if I want to live like this'; (which I do not). I have tried to lose weight."

What these examples illustrate is that for most people, having a job is not only a necessity to provide the means of existence but it is also of prime importance for self-esteem, social identity and status. However, it is questionable if activation (narrowly defined) is the best response to long-term unemployment where there are often a range of non-vocational issues and where the degree of intervention can be experienced as intrusive and demoralising. On the basis of this illustrative analysis, it would seem that the Danish system of case management is more likely to situate the unemployed person in a social context and respond to issues within a professional social work 'psycho-social' framework. The Australian examples illustrate a more individualistic rationality of intervention, and the case management process is tightly bound to activating economic employment outcomes. This difference, we suggest, affirms the importance of going beyond the universalising OECD discourse of 'activation' to examine the micro practices in the context of different policy priorities and programs embedded in national welfare states. In other words, the discourse of 'welfare-to-work' programs is still heavily mediated by the concrete institutional arrangements for delivering employment services. In the Danish case, for example, the discourse has not yet fundamentally altered the governance arrangements of a social democratic welfare state, whereas in Australia there is a

closer match between the active citizenship discourse and the aims of case management intervention. More research will need to be done in order to establish the generalisability of these illustrative findings, particularly to determine the extent to which the sample is representative of case managers in employment services.

7 Conclusion

Operating in very different countries at opposite ends of the globe, we have in this comparison, illustrated how unemployment policy is being negotiated in the micro-politics of social citizenship and government. We have shown how supply side unemployment policies constitutes its subjects, and how a sample of unemployed people respond to the identities and dispositions they are asked to adopt within the context of the activation enterprise. In doing so, we have reached into the hitherto opaque space of the case manager-client relationship that is the main form of intervention used to implement employment services policy. We note that this is a 'space' that has become of central importance to the attainment of policy objectives and is, accordingly, one that is central to detailed comparative policy analysis in specific fields.

For the most part, comparative policy analyses of unemployment policies have focussed on macro change, and have relied on survey data to draw conclusions (Considine 2001). Here we have argued, however, that such an approach misses the nuances and ambiguities of welfare restructuring and makes it difficult to fully appreciate contradictory developments between and within different welfare fields. On this point, Kasza (2002) argues that at the macro-level of comparative policy analysis 'welfare regimes' is in fact an illusory concept because very few national welfare systems are likely to exhibit the internal consistency to validate the regime concept. In comparative research terms, this means we need to pay more attention to welfare restructuring in specific policy fields, rather than make general claims about 'welfare regimes' according to pre- existing typologies (Kasza 2002).

In taking up this challenge our attention has been directed to an often overlooked (or at least under-reported) level of policy analysis, particularly in comparative studies. We have adopted the re-emerging inclination towards 'street-level' policy research to examine employment services in Denmark and Australia (Brodkin 1997). We locate our analysis at the point where policy is implemented – in the relationship between a person providing a service and a person using a service. These everyday interactions are critically important because it is in these spaces that political rationalities are given meaning. A 'street-level' comparative approach to policy analysis provides a means to demonstrate the micro-politics of unemployment and welfare reform, particularly how activation policies are implemented and negotiated by those subject to new conditions. This line of research argues that it is necessary to understand street-level implementation as a form of policy making, rather than an afterthought of political decision making (Wright 2003). We are interested in how unemployed subjects are problematised and reconstructed as worker-citizens. And while Denmark and Australia have employed different principles and policies to realise the activation aim embedded in 'welfare-to-work' policies, both countries have carried this agenda through the widespread use of case management.

Much can be learnt from exposing such seemingly mundane interactions. First, there is a degree of convergence in policy practice between the two countries, particularly in relation to the rhetoric and discourse about activation, the promotion of self reliance, and the notion that social assistance is contingent on the behaviour of the recipients. Nevertheless this does not mean that the same procedures and measures are implemented in both countries. While

illustrating some similar tendencies (for example, differentiating between types of clients in terms of the type of authority they will be subject to), the Danish case managers operated quite differently to their Australian counterparts. They were, for example, more attuned and responsive to the social and environmental issues confronting their clients, and they displayed considerably more discretion and autonomy in the way they worked. In short, the Danish case managers drew on a much thicker description of the 'social' in their understanding of unemployment. The Australian case managers on the other hand, were significantly more constrained, and operated in a manner congruent with the punitive policy context that they work within. They were also less able to use discretion to mitigate the effects of these policies because they themselves were subject to a range of organisational performance measures that focused on achieving certain output targets.

In large part, these differences reflect the different policy programs and the political and cultural orientations of a social democratic Denmark and a largely residual Australian welfare state. At the same time a focus on the street level reveals that it is not a simple case of assuming that the practices conform to dominant principles and rationalities of each country. While there is a degree of convergence taking place between these two very different welfare states, this is not automatically reflected in the practice of case management in employment services. On this point we conclude that in the context of contemporary welfare restructuring, a focus on abstract typologies or ideal types is not all that helpful in getting the measure of welfare reform (or any other major policy development for that matter). We suggest that in the instance of activation and welfare reform there is considerably more ambiguity, incoherence and contradiction than is suggested by linear accounts of this process, which often incorrectly assume that welfare provision is becoming progressively more neo-liberal. Rather, a closer analysis of case management discretion and policy implementation reveals the cracks and fissures in current developments. By dropping our research gaze to the street-level of policy implementation we have illustrated how what might seem straight forward and clear at the macro level of analysis quickly becomes murky, contested and ambiguous. This realisation leads us to agree with Clarke (2004), that welfare states are more than the proclamations of governments and sets of institutional arrangements, they are a multitude of complex social and cultural spaces that resist easy categorisation.

References

Barbier, J-C. 2001: Welfare to Work Policies in Europe. The Current Challenges of Activation Policies. Document de travail, no. 11, novembre 2001, Centre d´études de l'emploi.

Bedder, S. 2000: Selling the Work Ethic: From Puritan Pulpit to Corporate PR. London: Zed Books.

Berg Sørensen, T. 2001: Metodebog for projekter – aktivering og forrevalidering. Risskov: Forlaget Gestus.

Bigby, C. and Files, W. 2003: 'Street Level Leniency or Unjust Inconsistency? An Examination of Breach Recommendation Decision Making in a for Profit Job Network Agency', in: Australian Journal of Labour Economics, 6,2, pp. 33-45.

Brodkin, E, Z. 1997: 'Inside the welfare contract: discretion and accountability in State welfare administration', in: Social Service Review, 7,1, pp. 1-33.

Carstens, A. 1998: Aktivering, klientsamtaler og socialpolitik. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Castles, F. 2004: The Future of the Welfare State: Crisis Myths and Crisis Realities, Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Clarke, J. 2004: Changing Welfare, Changing States: New Directions in Social Policy. London: Sage Publications.

Considine, M. 2001: Enterprising States: The Public Management of Welfare-to-Work. Melbourne and Cambridge: University Press.

Cruikshank, B. 1994: 'The will to empower: technologies of citizenship and the war on poverty', in: Socialist Review 23,4, pp. 29-55.

Dean, M. 2002: 'Liberal government and authoritarianism', in: Economy and Society, 31, 1, pp. 37-61.

Dean, M. 1995 'Governing the unemployed self in active society', in: Economy and Society, 24, pp. 559-583.

Dean, M. 1999 Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society, London: Sage Publications.

Esping-Anderson, G. 1990: 'Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism'. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Dean, M. 1995: 'Governing the unemployed self in active society', in: Economy and Society, 24, 5, pp. 559-583.

Drøpping, J. A.; Hvinden, B. and Vik, K. 1999: 'Activation policies in the Nordic countries', in M. Kautto (ed.): Nordic Social Policy. Changing Welfare States. London: Routledge.

Eardley, T., Abello, D. and Macdonald, H. 2001: 'Is the job network benefiting disadvantaged job seekers? Preliminary evidence from a study of non-profit employment services', SPRC Discussion Paper, No.111, January, Sydney: Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions 1999: Linking Welfare and Work. Dublin: European Foundation.

Finansministeriet 2004 Lavindkomstgruppen – mobilitet og sammensætning, København: Finansministeriet.

Foucault, M. 1977: Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison. London: Allen Lane.

Gilbert, N. 2000: Transformation of the Welfare State: The Silent Surrender of Public Responsibility. New York: Oxford University Press.

Greve, B. 2004: 'Denmark: Universal or Not So Universal Welfare State', in: Social Policy and Administration, 38, 2, pp. 156-169.

Halvorsen. K. 1998: 'Symbolic purposes and factual consequences of the concepts "self-reliance" and "dependency" in contemporary discourses on welfare', in: Scandinavian Journal of Social Welfare, 7, pp. 56-64.

Handler, J. 2003: 'Social citizenship and workfare in the US and Western Europe: from status to contract, in: Journal of European Social Policy, 13,pp. 229-243.

Harsløf, I. 2001: The Integrative Dimension of Activation. Results from a Survey among Social Benefit Claimants, in: Working Paper, 12. København: Socialforskningsinstituttet.

Howard, C. 2003: 'Centrelink, breaching and individualised service delivery', paper presented at the National Social Policy Conference, Sydney: University of New South Wales, July 4-6.

Jamrozik, A. 2001: Social Policy in the Post-Welfare State: Australians on the Threshold of the 21st Century. Frenchs Forest, Pearson Education.

Kasza, G. 2002: 'The Illusion of Welfare Regimes', in Journal of Social Policy, 31, 2, pp. 271-287.

Kosonen, P. 1998: Activation, Incentives and Workfare in four Nordic Countries, Paper presented at the Conference: Comparing Social Welfare Systems in Nordic Countries and France, Gilleleje, Denmark, 4-6 September.

Kautto, M. and Kvist, J. 2002: Distinct or Extinct? Nordic Welfare States in the European Context. In: Comparative Welfare State Research, 7, 2002. København: Socialforskningsinstituttet.

Kvist, J. 2002: 'Changing rights and obligations in unemployment insurance', in: R. Sigg and C. Behrendt (eds.): Social Security in the Global Village, Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, pp. 227-245.

Lemke, T. 2001: 'The Birth of Bio-Politics – Michel Foucault's Lecture at the College de France on Neo-liberal Governmentality', in: Economy and Society, 30, 2, pp. 190-207.

Lipsky, M. 1980: Street -Level Bureaucracy. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Madsen, P. K. and Pedersen, L. 2003: 'Miraklernes værksted', in P. K. Madesen and L. Pedersen (eds.): Drivkræfter bag arbejdsmarkedspolitikken, København, Socialforskningsinstituttet, pp. 12-25.

O'Malley, P. 2000: "Uncertain subjects: risks, liberalism and contract.", in: Economy and Society 29, 4, pp. 460-484.

Oorschot, W. V. 1999: Work, Work, Work. Labour Market Participation Policies in the Netherlands 1970-2000. Paper presented at the conference: Societal Changes and Social Policy Responses, research Committee 19 of the International Sociological Association, Prague, 9-12 September 1999.

Pierson, P. 2001: The New Politics of the Welfare State. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rose, N. 1999: Governing the Soul: The shaping of the private self. 2nd Edition. London: Free Association Books.

Rose, N. 1998: Inventing Ourselves: Psychology, Power and Personhood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rose, N. 1996: 'Governing "advanced" liberal democracies', Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, neo-liberalism and rationalities of government, in: A. Barry, T. Osborne, and N. Rose (eds.): Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 231-252.

Morris, L. 1994: Dangerous Classes. Routledge: London.

Rogers, R. 2004: 'Ethical techniques of the self and the good jobseeker', in H. Dean (ed.): The Ethics of Welfare, Bristol: Oxford.

Rose, N. 1996: 'Psychiatry as a political science: advanced liberalism and the administration of risk', in: History of Human Sciences, 9, 2, pp. 1-23.

Scharpf, F.W. 2000: 'The viability of advanced welfare states in the international economy: vulnerabilities and options', in: Journal of European Public Policy, 7,2, pp. 190-228.

Sennett, R. 2003: Respect in a World of Inequality. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company.

Torfing, J. 1999: 'Workfare With Welfare: Recent Reforms Of The Danish Welfare State', in: Journal of European Social Policy, 9, 1, pp. 5-28.

Walters, W. 2000: Unemployment and Government: Genealogies of the Social. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Watson, S. 2000: 'Foucault and the study of social policy', in: Rethinking Social Policy, J. Lewis, G. Gewirtz, S. and J. Clarke (eds.):Titel. London: Sage Publications.

Wright, S. 2003: 'The street level implementation of unemployment policy, in: J. Millar (ed.): Understanding Social Security: Issues for Policy and Practice, Bristol: The Policy Press, pp. 235-253.

Van Berkel, R. and Møller, I. H. 2002: 'The concept of activation', in: R. van I. Berkel and Møller, I. (eds.): Active Social Policies in the EU. Inclusion through participation? Bristol: Policy Press.

Ziguras, S. Dufty, G. and Considine, M. 2003: Much Obliged:Disadvantaged Job Seeker's experience of the mutual obligation regime, Melbourne: Brotherhood of St Lawrence, St Vincent de Paul Society and the Centre for Public Policy.

Author´s Adress:
c/o Dr Greg Marston
Lecturer in Social Policy
School of Social Work and Applied Human Sciences,
The University of Queensland.
Brisbane. QLD. 4072
Australia
Email: g.marston@social.uq.edu.au
http://www.uq.edu.au/swahs/