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# Dispatches from The Fringe - A well intentioned Advocacy gets lost in language

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Advocacy by Talking Shop Ensemble and Shaun Dunne  
Sean Kennedy

## Advocacy by Talking Shop Ensemble and Shaun Dunne

Rating: ★★★★★

In Talking Shop Ensemble's production of Shaun Dunne's, *Advocacy*, a twelve week series of drama role playing workshops around assertiveness and relationship training form the framework in which the difficulties and dilemmas facing those with intellectual disabilities, as well as those supporting them, are explored. Throughout, the five-strong cast remind the audience that this is an issue of rights, of human rights, as they attempt to tell the stories they admit they cannot tell. Ambitious, brave and theatrically engaging, *Advocacy* attempts to heighten awareness of the conditions and context in which disability is lived and discussed in Irish society.

When it hits the mark, *Advocacy* drives home its points incredibly well. The power of negative conditioning, with character's fragile self-esteem falling prey to the negative words they tell themselves, is extremely well handled. As are the similarities between those labelled disabled and

those deemed normal. Dunne's writing talent shines through when his characters, freed from the language of the cause, speak freely and warmly, and the Tesco scene is a genuine delight. Performances by Niamh McCann, Lisa Walsh, David Fennelly, Rebecca Guinnane and Lauren Larkin are all strong with performers deftly switching between clients and key-workers. Throughout, Dunne's direction ensures everything moves along at a firm and steady pace.

Yet despite some wonderful moments, *Advocacy*, like the broader discussion around disability, is often crippled by language. In this case the language of care-speak. Characters and their experiences frequently get lost to their issue, becoming buried beneath a barrage of buzzwords, many of which are projected onto a tall, white screen throughout the performance. Throughout, the didactic, documentary tone and proliferation of care-speak drains *Advocacy* of much of its power. The sense of real characters and their lived experiences is often lost behind the politics of language.

Like Blue Teapot's excellent *Sanctuary*, *Advocacy* is a work deeply concerned with the needs, rights and experiences of those living with intellectual disability and of those supporting them. If its language looms larger than its characters, *Advocacy* still attempts to give voice to their deep frustrations and to their sense of being overwhelmed by the manner in which society responds or fails to respond. For this it deserves to be applauded. *Advocacy* is an ambitious work with excellent performances that bravely highlights the challenges of dialogue, with, and for, an often neglected minority.

*Advocacy* by Talking Shop Ensemble and Shaun Dunne runs as part of The Tiger Dublin Fringe at The [Project Arts Centre](#) – Space Upstairs until Saturday, September 13th

Doors open 9.15 p.m.

Tickets €16.00 Concessions €14.00

For more information go to <http://fringefest.com/festival/programme>



**Chris O'Rourke**

Tulsa Theater Examiner

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