



Bal Shodh Mela: From Pedagogic Event to Systemic Practice

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There is something profound about watching children fully absorbed in learning at a Bal Shodh Mela. In different corners of a school, student groups debate the accuracy of measurements, return from the village with interview notes from elders, rehearse presentations on water conservation, or calculate the area of their school ground with focused intensity. Abstract curricular concepts are worked through concrete situations, and visible learning is underway.

For State and district education administrators, however, such learning experiences for children remain an exception. Despite the clear pedagogic direction laid out in NEP 2020 and the NCF-SE 2023, implementation on the ground continues to be uneven. Experiential and inquiry-based learning often appears in the form of isolated activities or annual events, while day-to-day classroom practice usually is connected to textbook completion and syllabus coverage. During school visits, officers often focus on things which are procedural, such as

tracking syllabus completion or the rollout of government programmes, rather than examining classroom processes that indicate meaningful learning.

What is Bal Shodh Mela?

‘Shodh’ refers to inquiry or exploration. The Bal Shodh Mela is a structured pedagogic process based on the premise that children learn by asking questions, observing their surroundings, collecting and analysing information, and drawing conclusions. Teachers function as facilitators, while the local environment becomes a central learning resource.

Implemented over two to four weeks, students identify questions rooted in their curriculum and lived context, mapped to learning outcomes across subjects. Typical inquiries include documenting village resources, calculating school spaces, analysing occupations, household energy use, or recording local histories.



The 'mela' serves as a point of consolidation. Students present their work through charts, models, narratives, demonstrations, and discussions. The focus is not just on what students produce at the end, but on how they ask questions, gather information, and arrive at their answers. Practised across States such as Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand, the Bal Shodh Mela, when implemented with intent, functions as a repeatable classroom process aligned with curricular goals.

Importantly for administrators, this process makes classroom practice visible. Student work, questions, and presentations offer concrete evidence that can be observed and discussed during school visits and academic reviews. Unlike many initiatives, the Bal Shodh Mela does not require new approvals, additional budgets, or parallel reporting structures. It works within existing timetables and curricular frameworks, offering a low-risk, system-compatible lever for strengthening classroom practice.

What officers can look for during school visits?

For education administrators, the Bal Shodh Mela provides a practical way to observe and review classroom processes during routine school visits and academic reviews. Instead of relying only on syllabus tracking or programme compliance, officers can look for the following indicators of meaningful learning:

- Are students' questions visible in notebooks, wall displays, or classroom discussions?
- Does a single inquiry reflect learning across multiple subjects, such as language, mathematics, and environmental studies?
- Can students explain how they arrived at an answer, not just what the answer is?
- Is student work based on observation, measurement, interviews, or data collected from the local context?
- Is the teacher able to clearly articulate the learning outcomes being addressed through the inquiry?

These indicators help shift review conversations from activity completion to classroom practice and student understanding. Over time, they allow administrators to track whether inquiry-based pedagogy is becoming part of routine teaching at the cluster, block, and district levels.

Connecting classroom practice to policy intent: Alignment with NEP 2020 and NCF-SE 2023

The Bal Shodh Mela closely reflects the pedagogic direction outlined in NEP 2020 and NCF-SE 2023 in three key ways.

First, it operationalises inquiry-based learning. Students frame questions, gather evidence, revise assumptions, and articulate findings, shifting classroom practice away from rote coverage towards conceptual understanding.

Second, it enables curricular integration. A single inquiry often brings together writing and oral expression, data collection and representation, scientific observation, and social analysis.

Third, it anchors learning in a local context. By drawing directly on children's environments, the Bal Shodh Mela aligns with the policy emphasis on meaningful, contextually grounded education without relying on additional materials or parallel programmes.



Crucially, the Bal Shodh Mela does not add to curricular load. Instead, it reframes how existing learning outcomes are achieved, offering a practical route for translating policy intent into everyday classroom practice.

Implications for teaching practice

For teachers, the Bal Shodh Mela functions as sustained professional learning embedded within classroom work. Planning inquiries aligned to curricular goals, scaffolding students' questioning, and observing how understanding develops over time often leads to a shift from completing textbook exercises to designing learning experiences.

Across States, teachers report higher student engagement, stronger oral expression, and clearer connections between everyday experience and academic concepts. Over time, this process strengthens teacher confidence in using inquiry as a regular pedagogic approach rather than a special activity.

Conditions for sustainability

A persistent policy concern in public education is sustainability. Many school-level initiatives falter because they remain event-based, externally driven, or dependent on short-term momentum.

Evidence from States such as Uttarakhand indicates that the Bal Shodh Mela sustains when it is embedded within routine systems rather than launched as a special drive. In districts where the practice has endured, ownership has typically rested at the cluster or block level, with inquiries planned, supported, and reviewed through regular CRC and BRC meetings. Reviews focus on classroom processes and student work rather than event management, allowing administrators to monitor quality through existing forums without creating parallel mechanisms.

Within this framing, several enabling conditions appear critical:

- Bal Shodh Melas should be positioned as a pedagogic process rather than an annual event, with the substantive work taking place over several weeks in classrooms.
- Explicit mapping of inquiries to curricular learning outcomes reassures teachers that inquiry-based work supports syllabus expectations rather than competing with them.
- Implementation is most effective when it begins at the cluster level with small groups of willing teachers, enabling peer learning and gradual diffusion of practice.
- Ongoing academic support matters more than one-time training, with experiential orientations, classroom-level scaffolding, and structured reflection meetings.
- Process-focused assessment, implemented through observation notes, student work samples, and teacher reflections, aligns with the NEP's emphasis on formative assessment while minimising performative pressures.



- Carefully guided community engagement can strengthen school–community relationships without displacing classroom learning with ceremonial activities.

When inquiry cycles are conducted periodically—quarterly or biannually—they begin to blend into everyday teaching practice. Over time, the Bal Shodh Mela becomes a visible marker of ongoing classroom work rather than a standalone event, supporting both pedagogic depth and administrative oversight.

Implications for education administrators: Lessons for district and State leadership

For education administrators under pressure to demonstrate NEP-aligned change, the Bal Shodh Mela offers a rare combination: visible shifts in classroom practice, strong teacher ownership, minimal financial cost, and alignment with existing academic review and monitoring structures. For administrators, the Bal Shodh Mela offers several practical insights:

1. Pedagogic reform is primarily about changing classroom processes, not introducing new programmes.
2. Teachers adopt inquiry-based methods when they are supported through planning, scaffolding, and reflection rather than compliance.
3. Cluster- and block-level platforms are effective sites for demonstrating and spreading practice.
4. Learning evidence is strongest when drawn from processes, not performances.

Most importantly, the Bal Shodh Mela demonstrates that NEP-aligned pedagogy is achievable within existing public school systems.

Conclusion

The Bal Shodh Mela demonstrates how meaningful classroom reform can emerge from within existing public school systems. Its significance lies in showing that sustained pedagogic change does not depend on new schemes or additional inputs, but on clearer instructional processes, ongoing academic support, and purposeful use of existing review structures.

For public education systems tasked with translating the intent of NEP 2020 and NCF-SE 2023 into everyday classroom practice, the Bal Shodh Mela offers a credible and low-disruption pathway. It strengthens teaching and learning while remaining administratively feasible, making classroom processes visible without creating parallel programmes or additional reporting burdens.



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