

As you know, there is always a tendency for important technical refinements to be forgotten in popular usage of statistical material and I am afraid this is what has happened in the case of the Library Materials Index on certain book prices. The qualifications and limitations are omitted.

I am enclosing for your information a copy of a letter I wrote on March 22, 1961 suggesting a designation of the Library Materials Index in HEW Trends which would have made clear that this is by no means an index of all book prices.

In closing let me say again that I should welcome an opportunity of discussing the technical problems of measuring changes in book prices as you get further into your study.

Sincerely yours,

ROBERT W. FRASE.

Our concern about the tendency to use the Library Materials Index as if it were a true index of average book prices dates back several years as indicated by the following letter written to an official of HEW in 1961 suggesting that in the official publication of the Department of HEW—HEW Trends—more care be taken in indicating the nature of the Library Materials Index.

MARCH 22, 1961.

Dr. FRANK L. SCHICK,
Assistant Director, Library Services Branch, U.S. Office of Education,
Washington, D.C.

DEAR FRANK: This is the note I promised you about the page on book prices in the March, 1961 issue of HEW Indicators. Since talking to you I have also talked to Mr. Huyck about this and with Bill Kurth.

I would suggest the following modifications in the heading and the introductory sentences prior to the transfer of this material over to the next edition of HEW Trends:

"SELECTED BOOK PRICES

"The average retail price of those books included in the index was \$5.28 in 1958, 43% more than the average in the period 1947-49. Since the base period 1947-49, the retail price of books in the indices in science, technology, law, business and art increased 60% or more; books of fiction rose 32%. The index, which was designed primarily as a tool for library budget preparation, includes less than half of all books published annually in the United States and does not cover any paperbound books, reprint editions, encyclopedias and most textbooks. The category of education covers books about education, not textbooks."

Sincerely yours,

ROBERT W. FRASE.

As I mentioned in my recent letter to Dr. Rivlin, the Council has indicated that it would welcome the opportunity of conferring with the Department of HEW and with the U.S. Office of Education in determining what might be a proper method of measuring average book prices. If this Committee would be interested, I should be glad to furnish for the record a supplementary statement indicating my views as to how a true index of average book prices could be constructed. I believe that the best measure would be the average price per copy paid by purchasers for various categories of books and for books taken as a whole. The information necessary for the preparation of this ideal measurement of what the consumer pays for books does not exist, but there is a measure which is approximately the same—the average price received by publishers per copy.