

# The story of HEIHEI

A review of its development, challenges, and achievements

2023



Commissioned by NZ On Air

Authored by Brenda Leeuwenberg

## This review

This review commissioned by NZ On Air, offers an examination of the historical journey of the children's media platform, HEIHEI. From its initial concept to becoming a standalone platform and subsequently integrating video content into TVNZ OnDemand while establishing an independent games site, HEIHEI has encountered numerous challenges as well as achieved significant milestones.

This analysis encompasses the decision-making process, significant achievements, and areas where deviations from the initial plan affected project outcomes.

To compile this account, 12 interviews were conducted with content producers and games developers involved in the creation of HEIHEI, as well as key contributors to its conception and launch. Extracts from these interviews, anonymised for confidentiality, are interspersed throughout the review.

By exploring the successes and setbacks experienced by HEIHEI, valuable lessons can be extracted to guide future initiatives. This review aligns with NZ On Air's commitment to documenting and evaluating the development of children's local content funding.

This review sits alongside the NZ On Air [Children's Content Summit presentation](#) and [2022 Children's Funding Framework](#), which explored children's content funding over time and set out a path for the future.

By undertaking this process, the intent is to honour the achievements made possible by HEIHEI, acknowledge the unexpected hurdles that shaped its trajectory, and derive meaningful lessons to inform and enhance future initiatives in the ever-evolving landscape of children's media.

### **A note from NZ On Air about the author**

The selection of a suitable author was paramount in ensuring the comprehensiveness of this historical record of HEIHEI. After careful consideration, Brenda Leeuwenberg was commissioned to undertake this task. Brenda is a digital consultant and co-CEO of Nomad8. She was the Head of Digital and Innovation at NZ On Air from 2012-2018 and led the project to develop HEIHEI on behalf of NZ On Air. She left the organisation not long after the launch of HEIHEI in 2018 and briefly consulted for NZ On Air in 2020 regarding transitioning the platform into TVNZ OnDemand.

By leveraging Brenda's expertise, this review benefits from her knowledge of the project's inception, development, and the individuals involved. Her selection as the author was a strategic decision, ensuring that the historical record of HEIHEI presented in this report is thorough and informed by a nuanced understanding of the project's complexities and milestones.

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction
  - 1.1. Where it all began - the HEIHEI story
  - 1.2. Purpose of this review
2. Timeline of key events
3. The process
  - 3.1. Partner selection: The EOI and evaluation
  - 3.2. YouTube
  - 3.3. Māori Television / Whakaata Māori
  - 3.4. The good stuff
  - 3.5. The less good stuff
  - 3.6. What we learned
4. Project Management and Governance
  - 4.1. The advisory board/panel
  - 4.2. Principles and values
  - 4.3. Integrating te ao Māori
  - 4.4. Relationship between NZ On Air and TVNZ
  - 4.5. What went well
  - 4.6. What went less well
5. Technology
  - 5.1. Changes through time
  - 5.2. What went well
  - 5.3. What didn't go well
  - 5.4. What we learned
6. The content of HEIHEI
  - 6.1. New content
  - 6.2. Success stories
  - 6.3. Acquired content
  - 6.4. Games
  - 6.5. What worked
  - 6.6. What didn't work
  - 6.7. What we learned
7. Reaching audiences
  - 7.1. The audience
  - 7.2. Promotion
8. What next?
9. Summary

# Introduction

## 1.1 Where it all began

NZ On Air's research into children's media habits in 2016 revealed that 87% of parents agreed that it's important for children to be able to watch NZ-made shows that reflect them and their world. Fantastic local children's content was being funded and produced, however in 2016, most of it was found as one-time viewing on weekday afternoons on linear television. Increasingly this was not where children were looking.

At the time the seemingly unstoppable rise of streaming services and YouTube was both a welcome boost to the options for great content that children could access, but also a concern to many parents.

NZ On Air was then, and is still, a strong proponent of NZ children being able to find, and watch shows that reflect them and their world. But with changing audience behaviours and decreasing audience numbers, it was clear that something needed to happen.

It was in this environment that the concept of HEIHEI was conceived. Could a space be created for children to see themselves, to hear their voices and see their place in Aotearoa New Zealand? How might children be engaged and entertained in the spaces where they were?

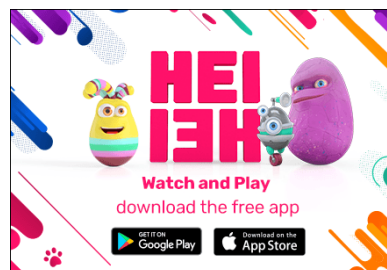
Stories are vital for the development of identity and imagination. It is through stories that children see and hear themselves, their culture, life experiences and environment. To have stories in a space that children could explore safely, to have quality content that affirmed their sense of self, community, and place, this was the motivation for the HEIHEI project.

In considering options for creating this space, NZ On air recognised several constraints: children's content is generally not revenue generating due to advertising restrictions, any new system would be competing with international streaming services, and NZ On Air could not 'run' a new platform but needed a delivery partner to create and manage an online space.

Consequently, an Expression of Interest (EOI) was issued, applications were assessed, a partner was selected and the creation of HEIHEI was underway.

*"The potential was so exciting - so much promise.  
A place kids would be able to find their content and have a voice."*

- Children's Producer.



## 2. Timeline of events

March 2016	NZ On Air <a href="#">releases an EOI</a> seeking ideas to connect content with primary-school-aged NZ children. The EOI does not prescribe a solution but specifies that applicants must have partners, reach, experience, the ability and will to contribute financially, and ideally existing infrastructure.
May 2016	Eight proposals are received and evaluated against the criteria outlined in the EOI. Two are shortlisted to be assessed in more detail by a review panel.
June 2016	Review panel of staff and external industry representatives meet with the two candidates individually and discuss their proposals.
July 2016	The panel reports back to the NZ On Air board. There is not a clear decision. Both candidates have by necessity drivers for commercialisation that don't naturally align with NZ On Air's kaupapa for children's content. The final recommendation is to continue to explore options with TVNZ (one of the two candidates), as on balance they are more aligned with children's media than the other candidate.
Sept 2016	TVNZ presents an updated response to the NZ On Air board. TVNZ proposes to start with research - to develop a deeper understanding of children's media habits and how they might respond to this concept.
Oct 2016	NZ On Air commissions TVNZ to undertake research into children's media and to begin scoping the technical solution.
Nov 2016	Research into children's media habits is conducted across NZ with groups of children aged 6-14. YouTube is identified as the predominant video platform for children, and games as their primary motivation for engaging. The research recommends that the focus for the project be on 5-9-year-olds as they are still reachable and influenced by parents.
Feb 2017	TVNZ's final proposal to the NZ On Air board focuses on their recommended research-led technical solution supported. The proposal is for a responsive website and web app.
March 2017	NZ On Air board commissions TVNZ as the delivery partner.
May 2017	Operating agreement and principles for 'Project K' agreed.
June 2017	First industry hui held at TVNZ with children's producers. The research into children's media use is presented alongside the new name, HEIHEI.
Aug/Sep 2017	The first NZ On Air funding round for children's content for HEIHEI.
Oct 2017	Kick-off workshop with funded producers at TVNZ. Introduced the option to work alongside Māori from the concept stage of projects and to incorporate te reo Māori.

	Discussion around digital environments and gaming. The initial premise of a website plus an iOS and android app is presented.
Jan 2018	Beta testing of initial HEIHEI concepts with children.
May 2018	HEIHEI launch event at WOAH studio. Marketing campaign launched.
July 2018	HEIHEI product enhancements on table - including Chromecast, captioning, language support, more browser version support, additional endpoints – all tied into Accedo <sup>1</sup> product roadmap.
May 2019	Accedo informs TVNZ that they will be stopping support for the Videa platform. This means the HEIHEI website and apps cannot continue to exist and a new solution for accessing and managing content needs to be found.
Aug 2019	TVNZ presents NZ On Air with four options for the future of HEIHEI.
Nov 2019	Agreement is made to move HEIHEI video content to TVNZ OnDemand (rebranded as TVNZ+ in June 2022). TVNZ advises that the OnDemand platform cannot support the HEIHEI games.
Feb 2020	Games producers' hui is held to workshop ideas for how to port HEIHEI games to another platform. Several options are discussed. The most workable solution within the timeframe and budget is to create an online cloud-based platform (modelled on <a href="#">Gamefroot</a> ) that could host the games. Standalone apps could be linked to from the platform and others integrated as HTML5 games.
June 2020	Apple removes the option for linking to external apps or sites from within an app. This means HTML5-based games only can be included in the HEIHEI games app.
	NZ On Air and the Broadcasting Standards Authority release the <a href="#">2020 Children's Media Use survey</a> . <sup>2</sup> The research states: <i>"Awareness of HEIHEI is sitting at 49% among children, and 17% have used it. However, despite the fact that nearly half of those children who have used HEIHEI enjoy it, children are not using it regularly. Platforms with higher reach such as Netflix and YouTube are more likely to be top of mind when children are deciding where to go to access their content. It will be difficult to contend with these goliaths."</i>
Sept 2021	A new draft children's funding strategy is presented to the NZ On Air Board. Across the course of late 2021 – early 2022, NZ On Air staff meet with more than 130 children's producers and media practitioners (both 1:1 hui and via group discussions). This consultation comprised 40+ hui and over 40 hours of kōrero.

---

<sup>1</sup> Accedo provide Videa, the product supporting content management, video payout, site and app infrastructure.

<sup>2</sup> The research shows a largely positive response to HEIHEI when users find it, but awareness is low. Overall sense that content is for much younger children and this, along with a less sophisticated user interface than expected, puts off the older ones.

Dec 2021	<p>NZ On Air invites a group of platforms and organisations to a virtual hui to present the changes to funding priorities for local children’s content. Invitees include Te Reo Tātaki (TVNZ), Te Māngai Pāho, Whakaata Māori, Prime/Sky, YouTube, Discovery, and RNZ.</p> <p>NZ On Air and TVNZ meet to discuss the impacts of the new strategy and NZ On Air’s intention to disestablish HEIHEI on TVNZ OnDemand in alignment with the new strategy updates.</p>
April 2022	<p>New direction for children’s funding is presented at <a href="#">Children’s Virtual Summit</a>. The strategy focuses on greater non-exclusivity of local children’s content and radical sharing to ensure that broader platforms than just TVNZ are invested in children’s content. NZ On Air recommits to annually allocating &gt;\$14 million to support the creation of children’s content and indicates that the HEIHEI integration within TVNZ OnDemand will be</p>
disestablished.	
May 2022	<p>Written feedback is provided by organisations such as SPADA and NZ Children’s Screen Trust. Both outline concerns about the disestablishment of HEIHEI on TVNZ OnDemand. NZ On Air confirms that a review of HEIHEI will take place.</p> <p>NZ On Air commissions <a href="#">Brand Awareness research for HEIHEI</a>. The research states: <i>“Awareness for HEIHEI has slipped since the 2020 Children’s Media Use report (54%), with less than half of parents and caregivers stating they are aware of the brand (46%). Overall, the survey data indicates there is a relative lack of engagement with the platform.”</i> When asked which platform their child (aged 4-9) mainly watched children’s content on, YouTube/YouTube Kids, Netflix, and Disney+ captured 70% of the audience. HEIHEI came in at just 1%.</p> <p>NZ On Air publishes its <a href="#">2022 children’s funding strategy</a> and confirms that single-platform distribution via HEIHEI on TVNZ OnDemand is no longer in line with research.</p>
July 2022	<p>NZ On Air children’s content funding round opens and announces that HEIHEI on TVNZ+ is no longer the primary platform outcome. The guidelines request applications for content on any platform including YouTube Kids. The guidelines state that projects with multiple platforms attached (and ideally multiple local platforms) will be prioritised. This will ideally be on a non-exclusive basis.</p>
Apr 2023	<p>NZ On Air and TVNZ meet to discuss details of HEIHEI disestablishment on TVNZ+ and agree a process and next steps.</p>
May 2023	<p>TVNZ begins removing HEIHEI navigation and branding from content on TVNZ+. All funded local content remains available on the platform in line with licensing agreements.</p>
June 2023	<p>NZ On Air discontinues its formal partnership with TVNZ for the management and curation of HEIHEI on TVNZ+. As a result, NZ On Air ceases providing annual platform funding to TVNZ for HEIHEI.</p>

## 3. The process

### 3.1 Partner selection

[The EOI](#) released in March 2016 outlined the opportunity. NZ On Air was looking for a partner that could invest in or extend an app or site or platform focused on screen content and made for NZ children.

A full solution was not required in the initial response, but applicants needed to broadly describe their proposed solution, along with how it would be managed, maintained, and promoted.

Eight responses were received and evaluated by NZ On Air and six were declined. The remaining two proposals were from TVNZ and a consortium led by another established media company. These two entities were quite different: one television-born, with an increasingly sophisticated and popular but still nascent approach to digital content delivery; the other radio and print-born but with a high emphasis on innovation and digital content delivery. Both companies had strong commercial drivers.

A review panel met with each team to receive a presentation of their ideas. Pros and cons were identified for each but there was no clear winner. Each team's response had merit as well as elements that counted against their proposal. However, on balance, given the other applicant's lack of existing content for the audience and limited track record of reaching young audiences, a decision was made to proceed with TVNZ to the next stage.

This project offered an opportunity to do something new and different. TVNZ - as the state broadcaster - had a long history of supporting children's television in the afternoons. While a benefit on one hand, on the other this history was part of the challenge that this project was seeking to address. There was a strong desire from the industry to test TVNZ's and NZ On Air's ability to work together in a different way to address the changing media landscape for young viewers.

TVNZ was invited to present a more detailed approach to the NZ On Air board in September 2016. Their informed recommendation was to undertake targeted research into children's media habits before defining the solution further so a tailored concept could be developed based on children's actual behaviours and desires.

As the process progressed and the concept for HEIHEI emerged, TVNZ was confirmed as the partner organisation to deliver the project.

### 3.2 YouTube

YouTube was the place where children were. NZ On Air audience research in 2016 showed YouTube was already the main platform for children to watch video content. The TVNZ research was showing the same thing. However, at the time there was some concern from parents interviewed that YouTube was unregulated, kids were finding all kinds of unsuitable content and the newly released YouTube Kids wasn't immune to unsavoury videos turning up in children's feeds.

There was certainly an understanding that integration with YouTube in some way was desirable. But the challenges were numerous - primarily that YouTube was not in a position to fund local New Zealand content directly, nor was it interested in contributing to the creation of a curated local space within YouTube Kids at that time.



Without money or resource on the table, YouTube itself as the main platform/home for NZ children’s content was not a viable option for NZ On Air to pursue. However, conversations did cover ways in which YouTube could be integrated with a new platform - and TVNZ undertook to explore this as part of the proposed solution.

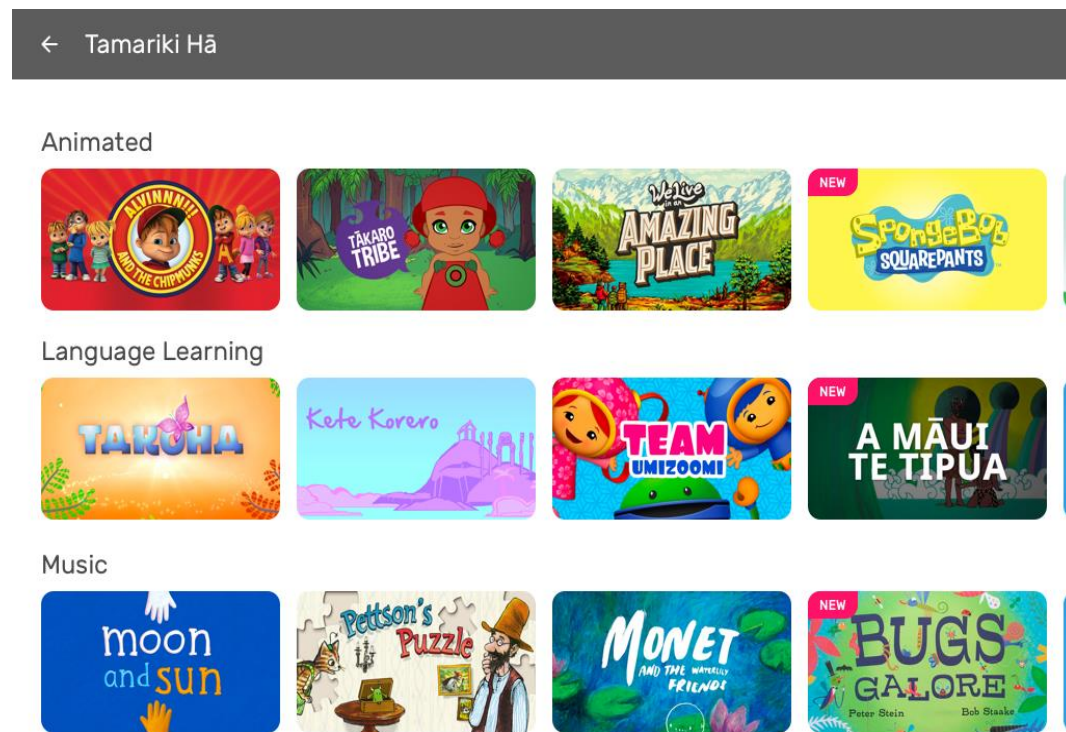
*“HEIHEI would always be up against YouTube because that’s where the kids were - and still are.”*


- Producer

### 3.3 Whakaata Māori / Māori Television

Whakaata Māori (known then as Māori Television) was in the process of developing Tamariki Hā - an online and linear stream of children’s content within their OnDemand platform and on air. NZ On Air, TVNZ, and Whakaata Māori spoke about merging the Tamariki Hā content into HEIHEI - which would deepen the bilingual content offering on HEIHEI and aim to support increased awareness of Tamariki Hā.

It was agreed that a band of content from Tamariki Hā would be incorporated into HEIHEI, with Tamariki Hā branding, and be collated into a te reo Māori collection on HEIHEI. When HEIHEI launched, a ‘swimlane’ of Tamariki Hā titles was integrated into the site.





Whether you’re after news and current affairs or entertainment, an update on your favourite sport or something for the kids. Māori Television has it covered.

### **3.4 *The good stuff***

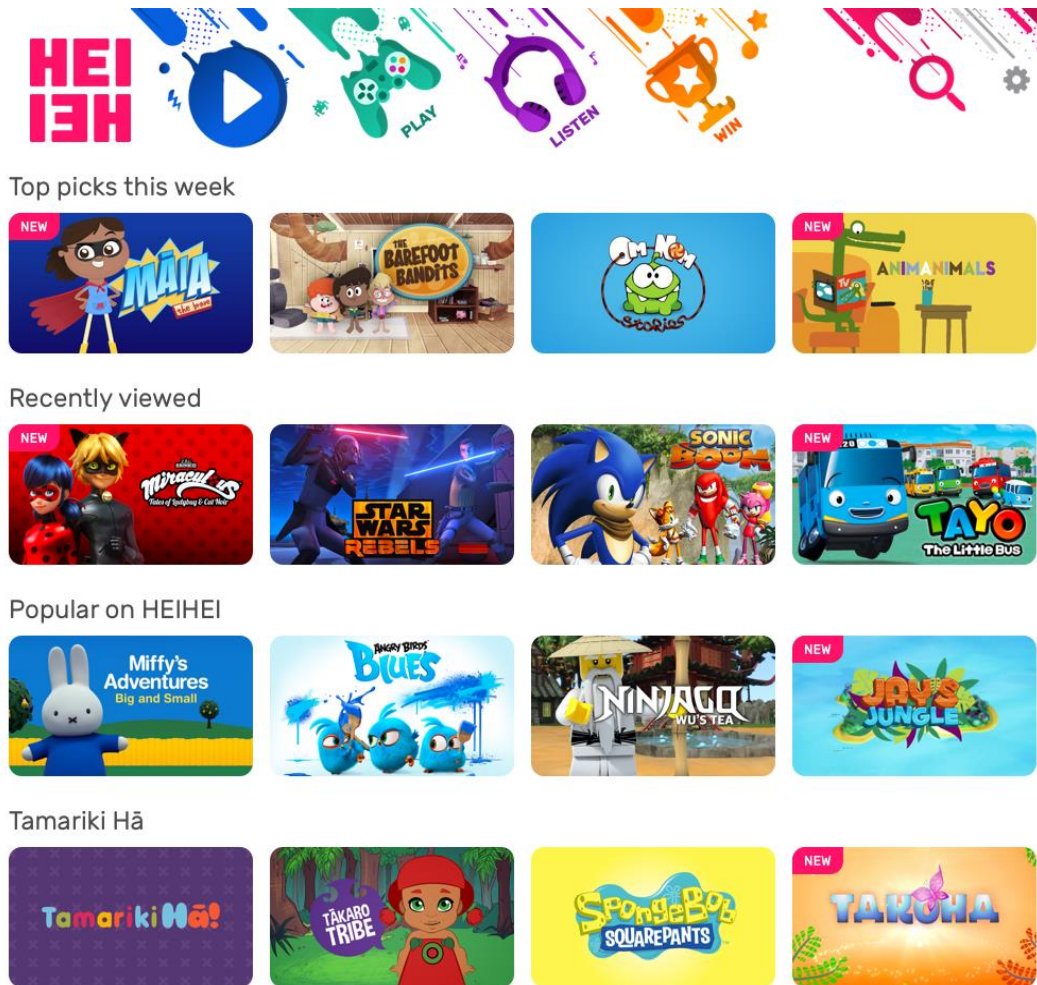
- Having an open and flexible EOI meant a broad range of applicants were engaged with different ideas that were not constrained by a pre-defined solution.
- The evaluation process was robust and fair, comprising independent assessors.
- Starting with research meant that children's perspectives, behaviour, and ideas were at the forefront of the concept as it developed.

### **3.5 *The less good stuff***

- In working through the process, it became clear that NZ On Air's desire for something new, innovative, and different would be a major challenge given the constraints of finance, audience, and partnerships within the marketplace at the time.
- Going with one delivery partner meant options for other partners to contribute to the project were limited.

### **3.6 *What we learned***

- Staff turnover within NZ On Air and TVNZ posed challenges to the continued effectiveness of the partnership. In order to ensure long-term success, future partnerships should be established and solidified throughout project delivery. The success of both sides relied on the presence of dedicated, enthusiastic, and available staff beyond key individuals involved at the outset. Additionally, incorporating regular review and refinement processes at the highest level could have provided an extra layer of protection.
- In hindsight, a stronger relationship with YouTube from the outset, including building and maintaining an active YouTube channel, would have strengthened the presence of HEIHEI content and built an audience alongside the HEIHEI app.
- To ensure children in Aotearoa New Zealand have access to varied and enriching content, it is crucial that any future cross-sector initiatives concerning local children's content prioritise and maintain strong relationships with Māori media.



## 4. Project Management and Governance

### 4.1 The advisory board/panel

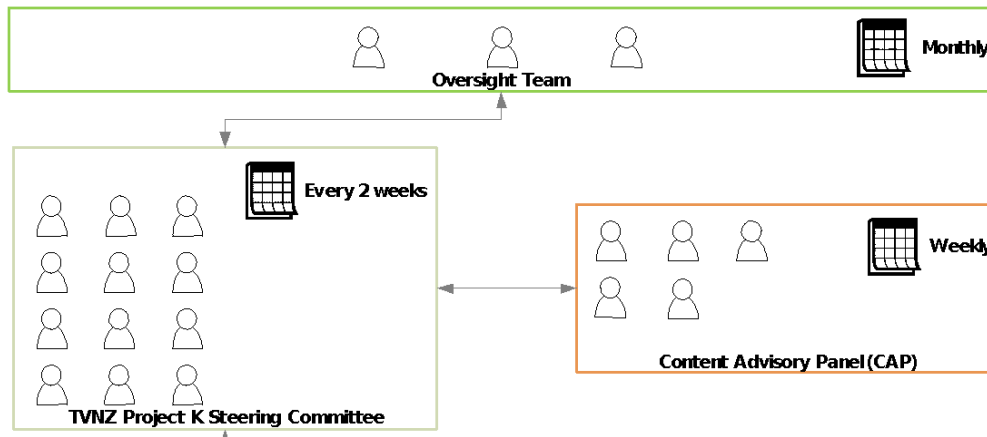
A content advisory panel was put in place to develop the initial content strategy for HEIHEI and oversee its implementation through the first rounds. A separate project oversight team was also established to receive reports on the development and progress of the project.

The Content Advisory Panel comprised:

- Janette Howe - representing the NZ Children’s Screen Trust and a strong advocate for the voice of children throughout the project
- Melissa Clark-Reynolds - technology advisor and entrepreneur with experience of developing MiniMonos - an online world for children
- Cate Slater and Amie Mills - TVNZ
- Jane Wrightson and Brenda Leeuwenberg - NZ On Air

The project oversight team comprised Jane Wrightson, Cate Slater, and Melissa Clark-Reynolds.

Additionally, a Project Steering Committee within TVNZ was set up to oversee the development within TVNZ. Brenda Leeuwenberg also participated in this group on behalf of NZ On Air.



Initial direction for the TVNZ team was to use Agile or iterative practices for the development project. However, agreement on what this meant was not consistent and once Accedo came on board as the key technology partner, the work was relatively obscured by the independent processes of their offshore team and working within an existing framework.

The project team also consulted with Netsafe, particularly in relation to children’s safety and understanding best practice around online behaviours. Their input was particularly insightful when discussing the concept of creating an interactive community that engaged children in conversation around content. The idea of allowing comments was dropped in response to Netsafe’s concerns about children’s safety and the requirements on moderation and monitoring content.

#### 4.2 Principles and values

Project Pillars were defined to underpin the project work.

<b>Content</b>	All interactive and video content adheres to principles and priorities.
<b>Co-creation</b>	Children’s involvement in the project at key stages pre-launch and ongoing.
<b>Diversity</b>	Representation of te ao Māori, diverse cultures, beliefs, abilities, and genders across the project.
<b>Safety</b>	A commitment to the ethics, privacy, and safety of children on the site.
<b>Usability</b>	The interactivity of the site to ensure it remains entertaining and exciting for children.
<b>Partnerships</b>	Partnerships to create opportunities for content creation, linking and curation.

Project Principles were established to govern the site’s development and operation.

### **Principle 1: CHILD CENTRED**

- The site would be designed for children and led by child-centred thinking. This meant that while both parties would add knowledge and experience, they acknowledged that child audience behaviour and preferences would actively influence the ongoing development of the site and its content.
- User testing would be conducted to check in with children and make decisions in their interests.

### **Principle 2: INTERACTIVE**

- The site would feature a wide range of age-appropriate content and invite and encourage children to add their own feedback and creative content.

### **Principle 3: PROUDLY NEW ZEALAND**

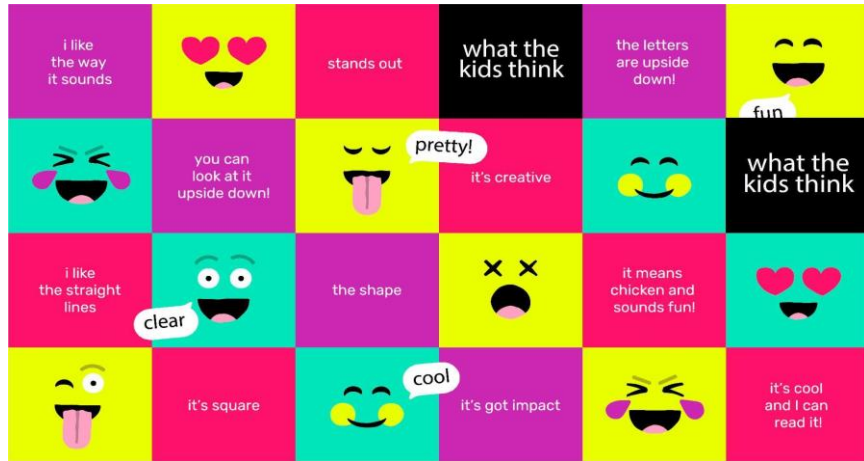
- Great New Zealand content would be prioritised and promoted with maximum effort.
- The site's values, design, curation, and 'voice' would be proudly New Zealand, positively reflecting the range of ethnicities, regions and cultures that make up the New Zealand population.
- Because children enjoy global content, the site would have a mix of content sourced from New Zealand and around the world.

### **Principle 4: A SAFE PLACE**

- The site would be a safe place for children to play and consume quality age-appropriate content.
- The site would be advertising-free, and could have appropriate sponsorship, where TVNZ and NZ On Air agreed, and would comply with FTA broadcasting codes where applicable.
- It would have high quality technical barriers to protect children's privacy and that of their family.

The children's content framework was developed with the guidance of the NZ Children's Screen Trust and Stacey Morrison. In line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), NZ On Air and TVNZ consulted directly with children and young people to ensure diverse voices were represented and participation by a broad range of children and young people took place.

The content framework set in place a central premise for the project, interwoven with four core concepts which encompassed twelve content pillars. The content framework provided the basis for any decisions about the content, the platform, the site, or the apps. It put children at the centre and gave structure to the whole project. The content framework continues to be used by NZ On Air and underpins the new strategy released in 2022.



kanorautanga + diversity (diversity)
hirangatanga + excellence (quality)

**It is committed to telling engaging and quality local stories that have a positive impact on the lives of children; using technology to spark their creativity and curiosity.**

ngahautanga + imagination (fun)
tuakiritanga + identity (identity)

**Ngahautanga + Imagination**  
(fun)

Engaging   Auahatanga (creativity)   Curiosity

Autonomy Mastery, Interests, Creative, STEAM, Characters, Comedy, Pranks, Languages, Song, Music, Dance, Events, Games

**Kanorautanga + Diversity**  
(diversity)

Difference | Uniqueness   Aotearoa | Local   Whanaungatanga (relationship, kinship)

Te Ao Māori, Cultural diversity, Local stories and history, Friends and whānau, Communities, Outdoor play, World culture, Animals and habitats, Diverse content genres, Connectedness, Ecological sustainability, Caring for our planet

**Tuakiritanga + Identity**  
(identity)

**Whare Tapa Whā** (physical/spiritual/family/mental health)  
**Kete aronui** (basket of knowledge of aroha)  
**Whakatewhatewha** (examine, inquire, explore)

Taha tinana (physical health), Taha wairua (spiritual health), Taha whānau (family health), Taha hinengaro (mental health), Emotions and behaviours, Seasons and weather, Taking care of myself, Sport, My body, Cultural Identity

**Hirangatanga + Excellence**  
(quality)

Accessible   Innovative   Safe

Technology, Interactive, AR / MR / VR / AI, Coding, User-generated topics, Mobile-optimised, Usability, Captions, Tailored for different platforms, Audio, Events, Keeping safe

### **4.3 Integrating te ao Māori**

From the outset, it was evident that HEIHEI presented an opportunity to work alongside Māori to reinforce the bicultural objectives of the platform.

Research shows that exposure to more than one language teaches children the process of puzzling out ideas, reading images and body language for clues. Connection to indigenous languages is linked to improved self-esteem, self-worth, and pride.

One of the fundamental principles that was embraced was based on research demonstrating the positive impact of television and screen content on language acquisition in children, especially those between the ages of 3 and 5. This age range presents an "early window of opportunity" for pre-schoolers, which is why a partnership with Whakaata Māori, and Tamariki Hā was established.

The framework above was generously guided in its creation by Stacey Morrison and drew from the Māori health model of Te Whare Tapa Whā. Stacey and Scotty Morrison were also instrumental in early-stage discussions with children's producers to guide their thinking - particularly in relation to the content. This involvement proved hugely valuable for producers, whose stories became stronger and richer through the process including consideration given to design input, kaupapa, scripts, and onscreen performance.

Their guidance revolved around the significant point that Māori language is now integrated into the majority of early childhood education (ECE) and primary school curricula. Consequently, introducing reo Māori on screens provides children with a contextual connection to their everyday lives, which is crucial for fostering familiarity. The key areas of focus were as follows:

- Correct pronunciation
- Repetition
- Natural, fun usage of language.

### **4.4 Relationship between NZ On Air and TVNZ**

This was a new type of relationship between NZ On Air and TVNZ. From the outset NZ On Air and the TVNZ team worked cooperatively and collaboratively towards the shared goal. The concept, design, content strategy and creation of HEIHEI was a productive and enthusiastic experience on both sides.

There were certain aspects of the technical approach, especially after Accedo joined the project, that posed difficulties in terms of delivering a platform that met the needs of children. However, it was during the commissioning and publishing of content, primarily during the period following the initial launch, where challenges arose to a greater extent.

The producers spoken to felt that HEIHEI was competing against TVNZ's commercial priorities when it came to allocation of investment in internal TVNZ resources to support the projects. Access to information and plans around marketing of shows was apparently challenging. It became evident, as producers observed during the interviews, that the motivations of each agency for this project began to diverge once HEIHEI had launched.

*“It felt like TVNZ and NZ On Air were partners but didn’t share the same motivations or intent.”*

- Producer

Producers' experiences with TVNZ varied greatly. While some had great experiences, others faced challenges. In certain cases, producers felt their shows were considered a priority by NZ On Air, but the network lacked enthusiasm for their projects.

Numerous producers faced challenges in obtaining audience data from TVNZ despite TVNZ making contractual commitments to do so. This lack of information made it difficult for producers to gauge the reach of their shows, make decisions regarding additional seasons, or determine necessary adjustments. Many producers expressed frustration in not knowing whom to approach at TVNZ for user data and as a result abandoned attempts to follow up on their requests for viewer data.

*“Initially we got data for HEIHEI but because people changed all the time, we lost track of who to ask. It’s hard to get data about ondemand shows.”*

- Producer

When the underlying technology changes resulted in the independent HEIHEI site and apps needing to be removed, the subsequent shift to TVNZ OnDemand signified a pivotal change in the concept and sparked concern particularly from the NZ Children’s Screen Trust. Their feedback at the time lamented the loss of the promised ‘home for NZ children’s content’, the lack of integration of games and video, and the dilution of the strong HEIHEI brand. Perhaps most significantly though, was the resultant lack of a strategic approach to commissioning and funding content, the loss of the holistic view of the funded content and its suitability to children at different ages and stages.

For some producers the move to TVNZ OnDemand was a relatively smooth transition. Some felt that the children’s content suited the TVNZ OnDemand platform better; the potential audience was larger, and the platform was continually improving. However, despite the potential gains, most of the producers spoken to felt disappointed that the strong HEIHEI branding and promotion was diluted alongside international children’s content.

*“Content commissioned is likely to be piecemeal, on a proposal-by-proposal basis, rather than with a cohesive vision for children and their range of ages, stages and tastes or a long-term view.”*

- NZ Children’s Screen Trust

*“Really important to note that the risks of trying to do something awesome without enough resources, exposes you to a higher level of risk because you just can’t afford to do it as well as it needs to be in order to succeed.”*

- Producer



#### **4.5 What went well**

- The Content Advisory Panel, particularly the contribution of Janette Howe and the advocacy of the NZ Children's Screen Trust, resulted in a robust and diverse content strategy that kept children at the heart of any decisions made.
- The NZ On Air and TVNZ teams working on the development of HEIHEI were operating in a high trust environment. There was passion and enthusiasm for the project and a strong drive to succeed, to meet the needs of tamariki.
- The 2017 [Children's Content Framework](#) is still being used in 2023 to support funding decisions.

#### **4.6 What went less well**

- The unique model of dual engagement between NZ On Air and TVNZ for commissioning content was expected to foster a positive and innovative relationship with producers. However, the disestablishment of the bespoke platform and integration of HEIHEI content into TVNZ OnDemand revealed a disparity in ambition regarding children's programming. Producers spoken to felt that TVNZ's focus remains committed towards afternoon television programming and fewer larger-volume children's shows, which differs from the digitally led strategy that HEIHEI was originally built upon. Ideally, an environment that allows for the coexistence of both strategies would be preferable. Unfortunately, the limited availability of funding for children's content has led to a divergence in the two strategic approaches over time.

## 5. Technology

### 5.1 Changes through time

The original proposal from TVNZ described a responsive website. One that would leverage TVNZ's OnDemand platform and benefit from future development that TVNZ would do.

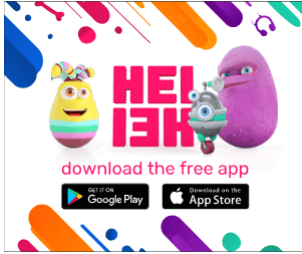
The TVNZ platform would provide video play, navigation and search, login and identity management, SEO, analytics, security, and performance, as well as development environments and processes. At this time, TVNZ was in the process of moving towards a 'single site' solution for their OnDemand platform and HEIHEI would be able to take advantage of the development and features that would come along with it.

One significant downside of the initially proposed TVNZ solution is it did not allow for interactivity or development of a native iOS or Android app. Gaming was clearly a priority for tamariki, and standalone websites were already on their way out as a primary source of video interaction.



Early in the development journey, TVNZ identified an option to use the Accedo Vide platform. This would allow apps to be part of the initial project delivery, would bring forward the delivery time and lower the development budget as the need for bespoke development would be greatly reduced. Vide integrated with Brightcove and allowed for curation and management of content. Some customisation would be required to integrate login and user accounts with the TVNZ OnDemand systems but the functionality needed would be largely out of the box.

TVNZ took the lead in managing the project and commissioned Accedo to deliver the technological aspects. While the application of the technology extended to other areas of TVNZ's online business, it became apparent that the envisioned level of design flexibility and interactivity would not be fully achieved. The limitations of the Vide platform heavily influenced the behaviour and functionality of the apps and website. Despite the frustrations caused by this, the project progressed. Ultimately a website, as well as an iOS and Android app were created.



A positive aspect of the Accedo approach was that games could be integrated into the app. Some were playable directly within the HEIHEI app, others were linked to from the games section.

The initial agreement with TVNZ included standard integration with YouTube, consisting of a HEIHEI YouTube channel as a promotional tool to drive kids to the HEIHEI site. The agreement also proposed embedding YouTube videos into HEIHEI to present curated YouTube playlists alongside the HEIHEI content. The need for an integrated player was overtaken by the functionality provided in the Videia product. While the HEIHEI YouTube channel was created, it was not maintained beyond the initial launch.

In May 2019 Accedo announced that they were no longer going to be supporting the Videia platform. The technology underlying HEIHEI would no longer be viable. This was unexpected and hugely problematic. A new solution needed to be found, and a plan for development and migration of content laid out urgently.

Several options for a new HEIHEI platform were considered including:

- Maintain on Accedo (short term solution)
- Migrate to OTT Flow - an alternative Accedo product proposed by them
- Move HEIHEI to a new custom-build platform
- Move HEIHEI to sit within TVNZ OnDemand.

NZ On Air and TVNZ conducted a robust evaluation of the possible options. When cost, functionality, reach, and long-term viability were considered, on balance it made the most sense to move HEIHEI to within TVNZ OnDemand as there was no budget to create a new platform from scratch. The HEIHEI content would be available as a hub on the TVNZ OnDemand platform when logged in on a Kids profile as well as a stream of branded content within the kids' section. This move provided some key benefits in terms of reaching more children, being available on big screen connected TVs and additional devices, reducing ongoing cost overheads, and enabling easier access to viewer data.

At the time, the NZ Children's Screen Trust pointed out that this shift risked losing the independence of HEIHEI as a trusted place for local children's content.

NZ On Air and TVNZ negotiated the parameters of promotion and branding of HEIHEI content within the TVNZ OnDemand environment.

Regrettably, the TVNZ OnDemand solution did not have the capability to support games. After consulting with games producers, it was determined that the most viable solution within the given timeframe would be to develop a new HEIHEI platform app using the Gamefoot platform as the foundation. This approach would allow games created in HTML5 or within an HTML5 frame to be hosted on the platform app, while other games could be linked externally.

## **5.2 What went well**

- The UX and design work done within the TVNZ team was outstanding. A strong, clear, defined brand was developed, and the user journey was well thought through and responsive to user feedback.

- In the first phase, the decision to utilise the Accedo Videa platform meant that interactivity was possible and games could be integrated. It also meant that standalone HEIHEI apps for iOS and Android could be created with future mapping out of additional endpoints. Standalone apps could be more easily promoted and created a safe environment for kids.
- Ultimately integration with TVNZ OnDemand meant a lot less support required for HEIHEI specifically - as the content became part of the overall TVNZ OnDemand offering and the underlying technology updates and enhancements did not need to be managed separately.
- The contract between TVNZ and NZ On Air was one of the most stringent NZ On Air had put in place. The partnership was tightly mapped.



We tested a number of colours with kids to find their favourites

---

From these results we developed our bright punchy colour palette that instantly grabs your attention

---

The set of colours have been selected to be web safe, fairly gender neutral and able to be used on both light and dark backgrounds

### **5.3 What didn't work**

- Although a YouTube HEIHEI channel was established, it suffered from a lack of maintenance. Presently, the channel only features 23 videos and has not been updated for a period of four years. Furthermore, the About section contains outdated information and directs users to websites that are no longer accessible. This is a lost opportunity for ongoing audience growth and awareness of new HEIHEI content as it is launched.
- When the Videa platform was discontinued, separating the games away from the video content significantly weakened the overall integrated HEIHEI proposition.

### **5.4 What we learned**

- Technology is fickle. Contingency planning for technology changes is vital. Being dependent on a third-party supplier for your core infrastructure is a major risk.
- If ongoing commitment to initiatives is necessary (e.g. the HEIHEI YouTube channel), it needs to be put in place with clear KPIs, supported, and monitored.



## 6. HEIHEI content

### 6.1 New content

For the first children’s funding round in 2018, 59 applications were received. An assessment process resulted in 23 applications approved from 19 production companies.

Since that time there have been 10 funding rounds for screen and games content for HEIHEI, resulting in 100 shows and 17 games. In total 57 companies have received funding for HEIHEI content.

The HEIHEI platform enabled numerous new creatives to be supported and resulted in many new stories that would otherwise not have been made.

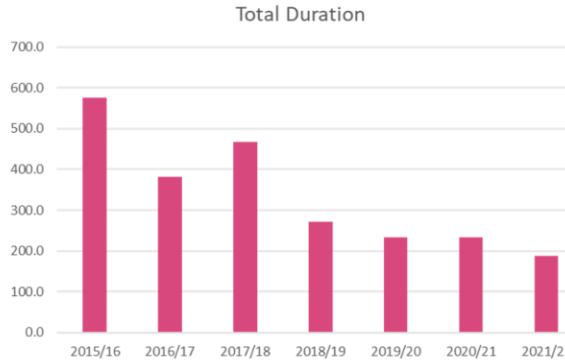
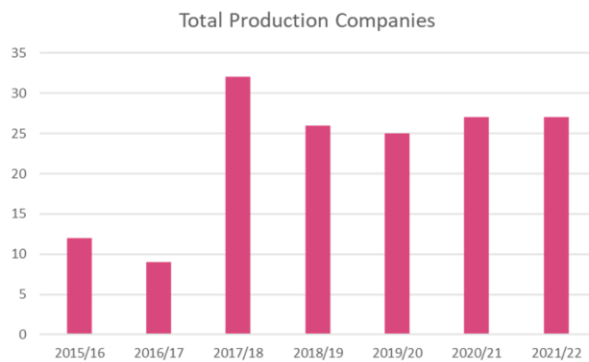
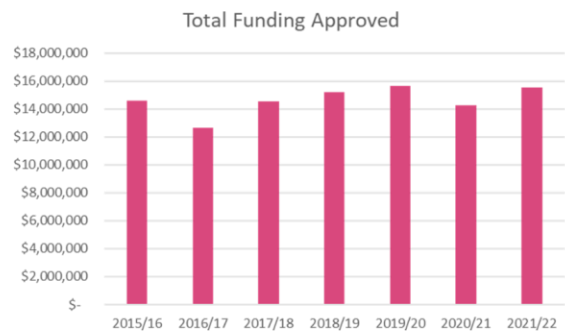
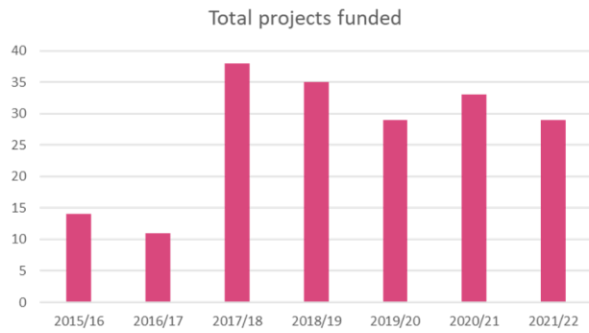
*“Jandal Burn and the Drawing Show, two of the highest rating animation shows on HEIHEI, were initially turned down by the TVNZ Commissioner. It was a great opportunity to be able to bring them straight to NZ On Air.”*

- *Producer*

*“Shows like The Feijoa Club would’ve struggled to have a place on networks without HEIHEI. It was fantastic to be able to have The Feijoa Club on HEIHEI, the process was relatively smooth.”*

- *Producer*

The snapshot below provides a glimpse into the effects experienced within the children's screen production community following the introduction of HEIHEI. It had a significant impact, not only in terms of the number of funded projects but also the number of supported production companies, which has doubled in recent years. However, it is noteworthy that there has been a noticeable decline in the total duration of content created on an annual basis. This decline could be attributed to factors including: the desire to accommodate a larger number of projects and production companies within the existing annual funding allocation, the industry-wide trend towards increased demand for shorter-form content, and the rising costs of production.



## 6.2 Success stories

There are many success stories of shows, producers or companies, that got their start on HEIHEI. The shows highlighted below represent a snapshot of the content funded for HEIHEI that provided a springboard for future success for producers.



Adrenalin got their start in the gaming space through HEIHEI. Their game *Flying Kiwi* is currently the most popular game on the platform. The games funding has enabled them to develop their skills in this space. One of their games (the *Taniwha* game) came Top Three in the world for a kids' screen award in 2022.



With a successful first series, Brown Sugar Apple Grunt went on to produce a second series of *The Feijoa Club* for HEIHEI. They continue to receive feedback from children and teachers all over Aotearoa New Zealand. The IP for that series has potential for further development on broadcast or online platforms. Without HEIHEI it may never have happened.



Mukpuddy, the creators of popular HEIHEI shows *The Barefoot Bandits* and *The Drawing Show*, have grown their animation studio and developed numerous new shows. They are currently creating a series of *Badjelly the Witch* for international distribution.



After winning 'Best Children's Programme' at the NZ TV Awards in 2022 and made possible with NZSPG, *Bird's Eye View* is set to take flight, with season one streaming on Air New Zealand in 2023. The team are very excited to be creating Season 2 with a trans-Tasman twist which has the Aotearoa New Zealand writing team working with Aussie writers Nick Boshier and Amy Stewart.



The creators of *YapTrap*, Resn, have secured a distribution deal with Jetpack UK. Since then, the team have attended numerous international markets. Buyers have reacted positively to YapTrap's unique format and absurdist skits.



*The Kids of Kōrero Lane* is the first series that is centred around deaf children in Aotearoa and uses only sign language to communicate the story. The series' cast and key crew members were all deaf or hearing impaired.

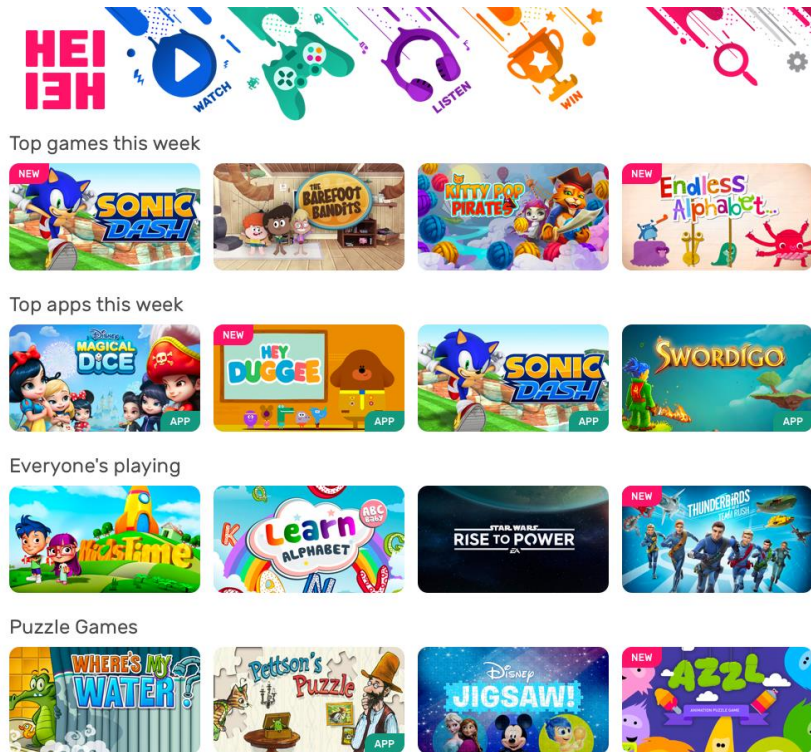
### 6.3 Acquired content

HEIHEI's content acquisition encompassed NZ On Air-funded programs, locally produced content that aligned with the platform's content strategy, and suitable international children's content sourced by TVNZ. The inclusion of international content was intended to attract children to the platform, enhancing its appeal.

TVNZ dedicated its own resources and annual budget to international content acquisition on HEIHEI in the two years leading up to the transition to TVNZ OnDemand. Subsequently, post-transition, the locally produced content was available both as a local stream on the TVNZ OnDemand platform as well as integrated alongside TVNZ's broader collection of international children's content acquisitions on TVNZ OnDemand.

### 6.4 Games

HEIHEI was NZ On Air’s first foray into games funding. It was an important step for both the games community and NZ On Air and there was a lot of enthusiasm for the opportunity. The funding criteria for games outlined having local flavour, encouraged Māori game development, and those that featured educational elements as key for successful applications. This introduced creative constraints that were challenging for games producers - in particular how to incorporate those elements and still make something fun and engaging for kids to play.



For the larger established NZ games studios, the lower budgets involved did not incentivise them to shift focus to this non-commercial 5-9-year-old demographic. However, HEIHEI ended up being a very good entry point for many new companies in the game development space.

*“HEIHEI got us started in the gaming space. We’re so thankful for the funding that was there. It’s been valuable for development, for presence.”*

- Games Producer

Initially games could be integrated into the HEIHEI app provided they functioned within an HTML5 frame and within the technical constraints, or be standalone apps, linked to from the HEIHEI app. However, integrating with the iOS store was challenging, with constantly updated Terms of Service and privacy policies that made maintaining apps prohibitively expensive. The final straw was when iOS prevented linking out to third party apps from within the HEIHEI app. Once that was no longer possible from iOS, games needed to be directly housed within the HEIHEI environment. This meant they needed to be built in HTML5 and/or operate within the HTML5 framing options.



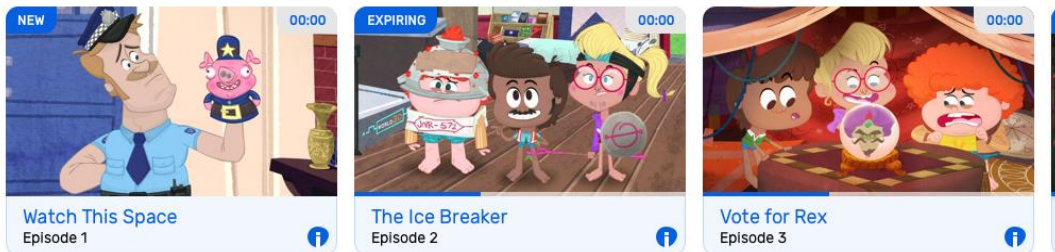
## The Barefoot Bandits: Water Bomb Battle

An intrepid band of explorers roam the oceans in search of adventure and fun. Led by a valiant polar bear and a daredevil kitten, these eight talented critters are. Max 200 characters includes spaces.



PLAY GAME

## Watch Season 1 of The Barefoot Bandits



Once the video content split off into TVNZ OnDemand, the games were housed and managed in a separate app, based on the Gamefroot platform. Gamefroot was contracted to create and support the platform, as well as provide support for developers who were creating games for HEIHEI. The Gamefroot environment provided building blocks for anyone to create their own game to go along with their show. Some producers took advantage of this, and *Gamefroot's Barefoot Bandits* and *Flying Kiwis* are standout examples of that.

Within HEIHEI the games initially drew many users to the app. But once the video content split off to TVNZ OnDemand, visibility and access to the games was no longer simple, the challenge of promoting HEIHEI games was a lot harder, and numbers have dropped consistently since.

From the beginning there was not a consistent focus on the quality of game play or functionality, that resulted in inconsistent game quality within HEIHEI. In addition, there was little focus on looking after old games - new ones are shepherded through onto the platform but there's no budget or drivers to maintain the games that are there.

*"Every game cost more to develop than the funding available." - Games Producer*

Producers report having little to no insight into the game play data for their individual games. The Gamefroot platform data shows that total game plays range from 157,000-250,000 plays over three months - more when TVNZ was actively promoting the games when they were integrated into the bespoke platform.

*"It can feel quite futile to put in so much work for something no one knows about. No one knows HEIHEI exists." – Games Producer*

In 2022 NZ On Air made it possible for children’s games and video content producers to access Contagion, an agency that would help them with promotion and marketing. This option has been welcomed by producers, as there has never been budget directly available through NZ On Air for marketing and promotion of funded content.

### **6.5 What worked**

- People started to think about how their content could be repurposed for other platforms.
- The branding and visuals developed for HEIHEI were considered strong and vibrant by producers.
- HEIHEI provided an opportunity for local indie games producers to create funded content for tamariki.

### **6.6 What didn’t work**

- Inconsistent and relatively little ongoing promotion meant that the visibility of HEIHEI dropped over time<sup>3</sup>. The strong branding of HEIHEI has been diluted on TVNZ OnDemand. While it is possible to see HEIHEI content it’s not easily discoverable on TVNZ OnDemand outside of a logged-in Kids profile. Consequently, parents who are unfamiliar with HEIHEI have no awareness that the little pink badge represents the platform.
- Some producers feel that not keeping a strong presence for HEIHEI content on YouTube from the outset is a lost opportunity. Despite YouTube’s overwhelming volume of content an audience would be likely to have grown over time.
- Loss of an independent HEIHEI app meant there was no specific destination to promote.
- Games quality is inconsistent which compromises the user experience.
- The integration of games into the Videa platform brought about new limitations for developers, resulting in reduced interactivity functionality. Games were required to be developed in HTML5 format or provided as standalone apps with external links.
- Apple removed the ability to link to third party apps from within their apps, which meant that apps all needed to be run directly on the HEIHEI Gamefroot platform if they were to be part of the HEIHEI environment. Not all games could integrate in this way, so some were maintained independently from the HEIHEI platform.

### **6.7 What we learned**

- Continuous technology changes and support are essential for any digital product, be it games or a platform. However, the current funding model employed by NZ On Air, which focuses on funding producers to create content, is not well-suited for providing the necessary ongoing upkeep and support for interactive content like games.
- Content needs to be consistently promoted to parents and kids so that they know it’s there.
- Good gameplay is crucial to successful game development.

---

<sup>3</sup> [HEIHEI Brand Awareness](#) (Kantar May 2022)

- A steady volume of new games content is crucial to keep audiences engaged and returning to the platform.
- Games need to be supported beyond their publication.

*There's an opportunity still for an experimental YouTube channel that targets tweens - create playlists for 7-13-year-olds. They don't have a place to go right now. - Producer*

*As a producer - it made more sense to create content for my brand / YouTube channel than to put in a proposal for funding for HEIHEI when it wasn't being properly promoted and getting the reach that it should have. - Producer*

## 7. Reaching audiences

### 7.1 The audience

Initial research indicated that the ideal age range for HEIHEI would be 4–9-year-olds. Within that, there needed to be a ‘younger kids / older kids’ split.

Ultimately having young kids’ content together with shows for older kids, put the older kids off. They logged in, saw shows that skewed for young viewers such as Peppa Pig or the Moe Show and decided it was not the place for them<sup>4</sup>. There was a lot less content for the older kids and so the younger content dominated the space. Young kids are aspirational viewers - they are happy to watch what the big kids are watching, but not vice versa.

Children that are used to the seemingly endless supply of content on other streaming services would quickly run out of options on HEIHEI and then go elsewhere. Getting kids to come back was challenging.

*“Once my son had watched a few things there was nothing to come back for” - Parent*

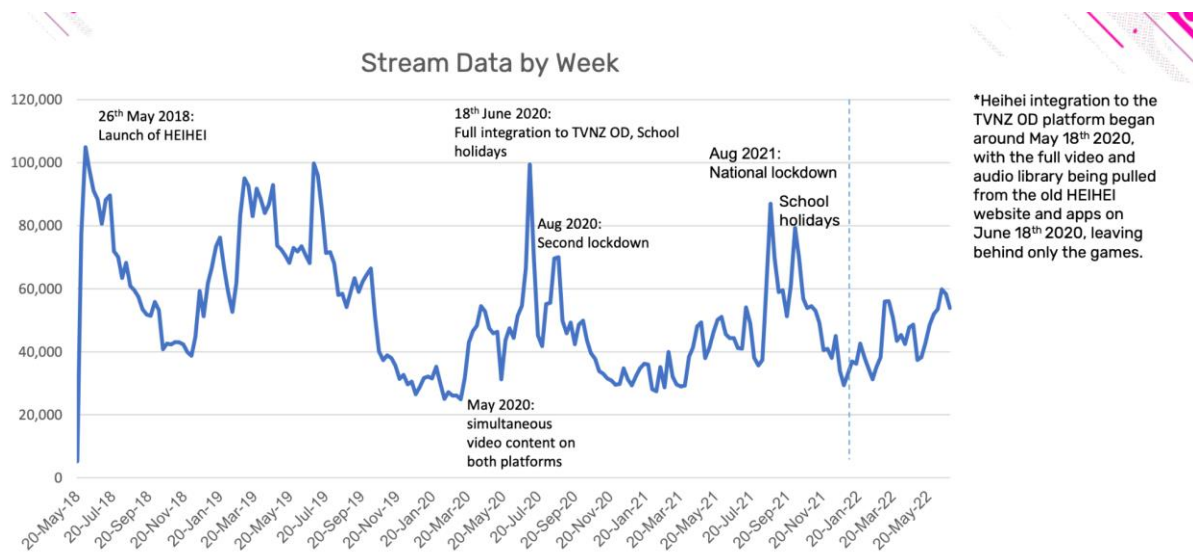
TVNZ reports demonstrate that the shift to TVNZ OnDemand in 2020 resulted in a 105% increase in audience reach and 122% increase in the number of streams. More of the HEIHEI shows were watched on the TVNZ OnDemand platform. From the stream data in the following image, we can see that before migrating to TVNZ OnDemand there was a trending decline in streams watched, the migration gave the content a significant lift before it started to drift downwards again.

Viewer data from the Quarterly report of Q1-Q2 2022 demonstrated 5,600 viewers reached and 51,800 streams viewed per week.

Analytics from TVNZ demonstrate that the majority (67%) of streams of HEIHEI content via the TVNZ OnDemand platform are via connected television. This functionality was not developed for the Accedo platform.

---

<sup>4</sup> [HEIHEI User Research 2020](#)



On TVNZ OnDemand, the HEIHEI content was divided into separate categories for older (Kids) and younger (Pre-School) viewers. To access the HEIHEI content as a filtered selection, users were required to be logged in with a Kids account. This login ensured that age-appropriate content was displayed specifically for the logged-in children. However, adults who browsed the Kids selection without logging in with a Kids profile did not have a clear view of HEIHEI content.

## 7.2 Promotion

TVNZ's original plan included provision of \$2m worth of promotional activity for HEIHEI. There was a lot of effort put into promoting HEIHEI at the time of launch.

In store activations in two major shopping malls at launch saw thousands of children engaging with the brand. Social media advertising, cinema advertising and on-air ads helped to raise awareness of HEIHEI in the early days. New shows were promoted through the Ondemand app and on social media platforms.

Producers were excited by this - traditionally getting promotional activity to happen for children's content was an uphill struggle, and rarely was any funding or significant support provided by the broadcasters. The HEIHEI brand was popping up everywhere and there was good awareness in the early days. The intention to bring together many elements in the kids' space felt proactive, it was exciting and felt responsive and necessary.

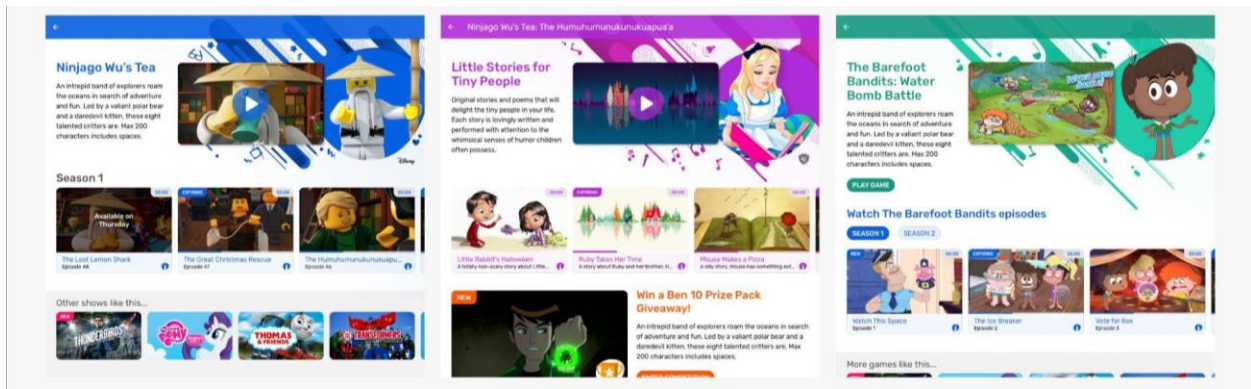
The annual contract between TVNZ and NZ On Air included an allocation of NZ On Air funding for marketing and promotion that was incremental to the rate card investment that TVNZ offered. This was applied largely around the launch of new shows or episodes. Marketing effort was focused on social media posts and paid SEM to supplement organic search. Shows were featured in Electronic Direct Mail (EDM) content from TVNZ.

Research into HEIHEI brand awareness conducted in 2022 showed that awareness of the brand has significantly eroded since 2020. The brand has little love amongst parents, including those who are aware of it, likely reflecting lack of engagement with the brand. A majority of parents believe it's important to have local content for children to watch - however this is not reflected in the reality of what children actually watch or engage with.

This is not likely to be a reflection of the quality of content that has been produced, more a lack of awareness about HEIHEI.

*“We were promoting programmes on HEIHEI on the radio show before it went to TVNZ OnDemand - then stopped because it got too hard to find the content.” - Producer*

*“No matter how great the content is, if people don’t know it’s there it’s pointless.” - Producer*



## 8. What next?

*“In the context of a media environment in which children have largely drifted away from afterschool timeslots and linear TV viewing towards YouTube and other social media platforms, NZ On Air has a responsibility to both incentivise local television networks to remain committed to broadcasting local children’s content on air and online, engaging them in these spaces, and ensure that local content can be pushed and discovered on the digital platforms where they are.”*

- 2022 Children’s Funding Framework. NZ On Air.

The newly released Children's Strategy by NZ On Air marks a shift from concentrating children's funding solely on one platform. TVNZ/HEIHEI will no longer remain the exclusive option for 5–9-year-olds' content. Instead, content can now be developed for various platforms, including YouTube, and funded marketing support for shows is offered through NZ On Air's partnership with creative and media agency, Contagion.

The concept of having a dedicated destination for all local children’s content is still sound. But many of the original challenges are still in place. Many of the producers spoken to believe there’s value in having a children’s brand, a place where local content can thrive. They spoke of the lost opportunity that the withdrawal of the ANZPM concept would have provided for children.

*“Children should have a dedicated stream of funding. It’s important for the fabric of society. This needs to be at Govt level, not at the whim of broadcasters.” - Producer*

It should be noted that creating a platform for children’s content that holds their attention and has the volume of shows and/or games that competing platforms such as Netflix or Disney+ have, is a multimillion-dollar endeavour. Additionally, a significant and ongoing budget for marketing and promotion of both platform/brand as well as content is vital to continued awareness amongst children and parents. A move to utilise the functionality of other existing platforms and to put funding into continuing to create great content is likely to be the better use of public funding.

## 9. Summary

HEIHEI was created in response to a need to serve children with local content, to reflect their world back to them in a safe and curated place. In 2016, research demonstrated that children were increasingly consuming international content on digital platforms, but parents wanted their children to see New Zealand made content. It was a problem looking for a solution. Putting everything into one platform, a single online place for all funded children's content, may not have been the right long-term approach. But at that time, within the constraints and the resources available, it was the approach that made the most sense.

From an initial high, the fall in awareness and use of HEIHEI can be attributed to many factors; change of technology resulting in losing the standalone HEIHEI apps, key staff turnover at both TVNZ and NZ On Air, challenges around effective and ongoing marketing and promotion, and the increasing competition from wealthier and stronger international streaming platforms.

The obvious question to ask is 'what would it take to have made this succeed'? Even with good intentions and a capable and engaged team involved, an ability to see in advance technological challenges and changes in relation to the hosting and delivery of games, a larger budget and commitment to promotion and discoverability of the content, what additional elements were necessary to make it work? Unfortunately, a significant aspect of the answer is likely to be a significantly higher content budget allocation and prioritised marketing expenditure. To build a standalone digital platform that is curated and flexible enough to deliver a quality customer experience and promoted to attract and retain audiences in the face of massive global competitors is a large undertaking.

Ultimately, there needs to be a commitment to New Zealand's young people, to their ability to see and hear themselves on screen. Every generation that is further away from having had that experience and exposure as a child, puts less priority on creating that for their own children. The harder it gets the more important it is.

While the disestablishment of HEIHEI is disappointing, the numerous incredible shows and games that were created for young audiences over the past five years must be acknowledged and celebrated. It is crucial that these content offerings continue to be showcased and supported wherever they are available so that they continue to be enjoyed and appreciated by current and future generations.

