The success story of the Institute of the Peoples of the North began in 1930, when Herzen State Pedagogical University in St. Petersburg invented a new department — a response to Indigenous languages and cultures for educators working in the Russian Arctic. The number of programs and courses on Arctic Indigenous languages and culture grew steadily and, in 2001, were organized into the Institute as it is known today.

The Institute of the Peoples of the North currently teaches 23 Indigenous languages and offers Bachelor, Master, and PhD programs in four departments: Altai languages, folklore and literature; Ural languages, folklore and literature; Paleo-Asian languages, folklore and literature; and ethnocultural science.

The Institute’s largely Indigenous faculty and leadership distinguishes it from other linguistic and cultural studies departments. The Institute annually admits students from small-numbered Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of Russia. Many Indigenous graduates have returned to the Institute to continue studying and promoting their languages, and went on to become professors, department heads and institute directors.

Other graduates have returned to their home regions. Most of them became teachers, but some have become writers, academics, journalists, museum workers, translators, masters of arts and crafts and performers of dance and musical folklore. The Institute’s graduates, teachers, and researchers have developed writing systems for transcribing Arctic Indigenous languages and produced textbooks and teaching materials on Indigenous languages and literature. All in all, the Institute has trained more than 3,000 specialists of Indigenous languages, literature, and culture.

The Institute also hosts the Northern Borealis ensemble — a folklore theatre which strengthens Arctic Indigenous languages through the performance of unique Indigenous dances, songs, and musical traditions. The group has become a creative laboratory that develops, revitalizes, and creates modern art forms from Indigenous Peoples’ dances and musical folklore. The ensemble gives concerts regularly in St. Petersburg and Moscow, but has also performed far and wide both at home and abroad in Finland, Italy, Spain, Lithuania, the USA, and countless international festivals and events.

Along with the dance group, the Institute cooperates with many partners — including the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Russian Ethnographic Museum, the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), the Museum of History and Religion, and others — to use both academics’ and practitioners’ expertise in the development and revitalization of Indigenous Peoples’ languages and cultures in Russia.

Institute of the Peoples of the North
in St. Petersburg, Russia

Almost a century of Indigenous linguistic and cultural studies